

Book of the Week.

SELMA.*

This novel is remarkable for one fact. The author has written it in order to show forth something which she herself strongly feels, and has succeeded in so doing. The theme, the idea that permeates the book is this, that the Tolstoian idea of sacrifice does not work, is, as a matter of fact, not the true theory of duty and of life. Altruism is a mistake; the old Christian idea of duty to your neighbour is the right thing. Christianity being a world-wide creed and eminently sane, says: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Tolstoism, being the idea of one man's brain, says: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour better than thyself."

Lucas Cleeve wishes to show that this is a wrong system; that in operation it is as bad for the one for whom the sacrifice is made as it is for the one who makes it.

Selma Wallgren is a young Finnish prima donna who has had a great success in Vienna. She is much admired; she is the rage of the hour; but she is reported "good." Nobody has ever said a word against her. There is in Vienna a certain Count Rudolf Wiensbach, of the most blue-blooded nobility—an old man who has gambled away half his fortune, while his handsome son Ludwig is fast frittering away the rest.

A financier called Krug is anxious to strike a bargain with the old man. If Ludwig will marry Krug's daughter, Lena, then Krug will be responsible for the sinews of war. If not, then Krug holds mortgages, and can make the house of Wiensbach totter.

Now it is an open secret that Ludwig is infatuated with Selma Wallgren. His old father and Krug do not know how to act. If only Selma were not "good" there would be no difficulty, the thing would become a mere question of money; but they are terribly afraid that Ludwig has married Selma; and this is, in fact, the case.

The young couple begin to see that their secret is leaking out, and decide that Ludwig's father must be told. But Ludwig is anxious not to do this for a couple of days, as he wishes to borrow more money from the old man and fears to put him in a rage until this has been arranged.

Things being so, the old Count, who has found out everything, steals a march by calling upon his daughter-in-law. He asks Selma straight out if she is married to his son, and Selma, mindful of the compact made but now with her adored husband, says "No."

On this sacrifice on the part of the heroic girl the rest of the story hangs. We shall not divulge it, beyond saying that the other woman who loves Ludwig, Lena Krug, also makes a supreme sacrifice for him—and disaster is the result. Had each woman done what she knew to be right, instead of what she believed to be the best for Ludwig, the worst might have been spared. Ludwig is a spoilt young fellow,

full of good impulses, but as selfish as any other not very remarkable young man, of remarkable beauty; would be in his circumstances. To leave him to face the consequences of his own acts would have been the thing to do. In trying to shield him from them the two women make a terrible mistake.

The book bears marks of haste, and the English is by no means above reproach; but underlying all is the conviction that tells. One sees the mistakes made by these people, one sees how they came to make them. Ludwig's treachery is by no means incredible in a man of his stamp; and we are made to sympathise even with the poor Lena before the end.

G. M. R.

Coming Events.

January 25th.—Lecture on Public Health and Hygiene by Dr. Newman, D.P.H., to the League of St. Bartholomew's Hospital Nurses, at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, E.C. 5.45 p.m.

January 29th.—Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Registered Nurses' Society, 431, Oxford Street, W. 5 p.m.*

January 31st.—Annual Meeting of the Matrons' Council of Great Britain and Ireland, 431, Oxford Street, W. 4 p.m.*

January 31st.—Meeting of British Councillors of International Council of Nurses to consider the arrangements for the Paris Conference, 431, Oxford Street, W. 5.30 p.m.*

January 31st.—Lecture on "Our Teeth; why we lose them: and how we may keep them" (illustrated by lantern slides) by R. Denison Pedley, Esq., F.R.C.S., at the Parkes Museum, 72, Margaret Street, W. The first of an interesting series to be delivered weekly until March 21st, under the auspices of the Childhood Society and the British Child Study Association.

February 1st.—Meeting of Executive Committee of the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses, 431, Oxford Street, W. 4.30 p.m.*

What to Read.

"The Nursling: The Feeding and Hygiene of Premature and Full-Term Infants." By Pierre Budin. Authorised translation by William J. Maloney, M.B., Ch.B. With an introduction by Sir Alexander R. Simpson, M.D.

"Foes in Law." By Rhoda Broughton.

"The Sacrifice." By Alphonse Courlander.

"Life's Shop Window." By Victoria Cross.

A Word for the Week.

It is not enough to know; we must turn what we know to account. It is not enough to will; we must do.—*GOETHE.*

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*By Lucas Cleeve. (John Long and Co.)

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