

Book of the Week.

ARETHUSA.*

As the scene of Mr. F. Marion Crawford's latest novel is laid in Constantinople in the year 1876, we are prepared for a real romance, and there is no living author who can more ably deal with this style of story. In his hands it never degenerates into a mere book of wild adventure and hair-breadth escapes only suitable for boys; it has a great deal more than an exciting plot to commend it. In the first place there is the writing, which is always excellent; in the second the character drawing, and in that Mr. Marion Crawford is an expert. It is never very difficult for a writer to portray the male or female villain, the infinitely harder type to cope with is the human hero or heroine—the being who must not be "too good to be true."

The character of "Arethusa," the self-made slave, is a beautiful one; she was a perfect woman, but a real woman, whose faults were just those to be expected of her. Carlo Zeno had led a very ordinary life for a young man of his day, his tastes were neither abnormally good nor bad, and when he became possessed, by a curious fluke, of a singularly lovely, and at the same time mysterious, female slave, his perplexities began in real earnest. He was commissioned by a friend living in Venice to purchase the most beautiful slave he could find in the Constantinople market. The quest was not an agreeable one to him, and he started upon it with merely a desire to get it done. It happened that the very first slave offered to him had such an unexpected and extraordinary appearance that the whole chivalry of the man's nature was captured, to say nothing of his curiosity. He could neither find it in his heart to purchase her for his friend, whose character was well known to him, nor could he bear to leave her to be sold into any other equally doubtful keeping. The girl, herself, being very sore at heart, and naturally terrified of what her fate might be, baffled all enquiries, for adequate reasons of her own, and Zeno, in his dilemma, bought her himself to gain time and think the matter out. Her arrival in his bachelor establishment with two dark-skinned, ordinary slaves, was an upsetting event both to himself and his devoted little secretary, Omobono, whose quaint daily prayer that he might be given strength to "resist curiosity," became increasingly necessary. Being unable to break down Arethusa's reserve, Zeno alternated between decisions as to her ultimate fate, and consequently did nothing. But of one thing he became persuaded, and that was that she was lawfully a slave, and not a woman in need of chivalrous interference on her behalf. A further surprise for him was the discovery that she was in some mysterious way connected with the political party with which he was most in sympathy; and she actually acted as a medium through whom he

received messages that eventually compelled him to take up a leadership he had never before contemplated. Fascinated by the girl's strange personality, repelled from the thought of marriage with her by the rank which he believed to be hers, Zeno's perturbation of spirit was intense, and is most convincingly depicted. Drawn to him from the outset by his generosity, Arethusa's instinctive trust became very real love, and the fencing with emotions between the two forms the basis of a most interesting and enthralling story.

E. L. H.

Coming Events.

December 24th—West Ham and East London Hospital, Stratford. Distribution of gifts from the Christmas Tree to in-patients. Tea and coffee, 4—6.

December 25th—(Christmas Day).—Distribution of Gifts to Hospital Patients.

December 28th.—The Hospital for Women, Soho Square, London, W. Concert for the patients, 3.30—5.30 p.m.

THE GREAT GUEST COMES.

"While the cobbler mused there passed his pane,
A beggar drenched by the driving rain.
He called him in from the stony street
And gave him shoes for his bruised feet.
The beggar went and there came a crone,
Her face with wrinkles and sorrow sown,
A bundle of faggots bowed her back,
And she was spent with the wrench and rack.
He gave her his loaf and steadied her load
As she took her way on the weary road.
Then to his door came a little child,
Lost and afraid in the world so wild,
In the big, dark world. Catching it up,
He gave it the milk in the waiting cup,
And led it home to its mother's arms,
Out of the reach of the world's alarms.

"The day went down in the crimson west,
And with it the hope of the blessed Guest.
And Conrad sighed as the world turned gay:
'Why is it, Lord, that Your feet delay,
Did You forget that this was the day?'
Then soft, in the silence a Voice he heard:
'Lift up your heart, for I kept my word.
Three times I came to your friendly door;
Three times my shadow was on your floor.
I was the beggar with the bruised feet;
I was the woman you gave to eat;
I was the child on the homeless street.'"

From a poem by Edwin Markham.

NÖEL, NÖEL.

"Minuit, Chrétiens! c'est l'heure solennelle:
Où l'Homme-Dieu descendit parmi nous!
Peuple, debout! Chante ta délivrance!
Noël! Noël! Voici le Rédempteur!"

* F. Marion Crawford. (Macmillan and Co.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)