

Book of the Week.

IDOLATRY.*

To describe a woman's writing as masterly is to praise it to the utmost. There is at once the suggestion that, added to her own most desirable qualifications—quick unerring insight, tenderness, and a necessarily superior knowledge of her own sex—she has the restraint, strength, and equity of judgment which should be the salient characteristics of the male writer of fiction. The perfect novel is of course the book that nowhere, except on the title page, reveals the sex of the writer; an impossible achievement for any but the true artist, for whom the whole book of everyday existence is opened by the magic of intuitive sympathy.

Testing it on these lines it is no exaggeration to say that Mrs. Perrin's latest novel "Idolatry" is a "perfect book." It is unquestionably masterly, a fact which comes as no surprise to the well-read public because it looks for nothing less from Mrs. Perrin. But it happens that this time she has given us something more than charm and vigour of style, there is added a subtle something that lifts her above the high level she had already attained. What the nature is of the new magnetism can only be discovered by reading the book itself—every page, every line, that nothing be lost. It is one of the intangible things driven home by the magic of the born narrator. We have before us a fairly simple story, on the whole, in which humour, pathos, delicate description, crude reality, tender delineation, yet inexorable exactitude of characterisation are all gathered and welded together with extraordinary finish. It is not merely the pleasant, easy writing that is so seductive, nor even the skill of well balanced effects, but something that goes deeper and gets a grip of one in spite of oneself. The main reason for this is, of course, that the work is sincere; there can be no doubt that the author is in earnest, and a book written from conviction is bound both to attract and to hold. I will not label "Idolatry" with the abhorred description "a novel with a purpose"—nothing could sum it up more inadequately, but to deny that it has a purpose would be to say that it has no backbone. It is just because people do write books so purposelessly that we are subjected to nine-tenths of the flabby stuff that tries to palm itself off as legitimate literature now-a-days. Mrs. Perrin indulges in no effeminate emotionalism—nothing abnormal or exaggerated. It is obviously not her ambition to write melodrama, but to depict life—life not waste or decay.

Take any character you choose from "Idolatry," you will find it instinct with every possible human quality, not one is faultless, but, on the other hand, the poisonous belief that anyone can be so irredeemably weak as to be forced by temperament or up-bringing to stagnate is not thrust down one's throat. The doctrine of free will is demonstrated throughout. We find it in the development of the social butterfly, the awakening of the man lying dormant in the spiritual enthusiast; the stolid

jealousy of faithful Dion Devasse: each is in itself a gem of portraiture. The influences in Anne Crivener's life are marvellously given, from the old social autocrat, "Granny," who set her so hopelessly on the wrong road for happiness, to Anne's equally inadequate missionary relations in India. Nothing could be more amusing, yet withal more touching, than the picture of life in the Mission bungalow which for awhile Anne makes her home. All the minor characters are convincingly essential to the story. Mrs. Perrin plays no tricks with light and shade, and uses only necessary material. From the midst of those same secondary characters there stands out one with a haunting persistence that makes one wonder whether after all he is not meant to be the most important figure in the whole scheme of the book—Ramanund, the victim of prejudice and caste. What was the fate of that cultured, unsatisfied seeker after the Truth? What is to be the fate of those for whom he stands as type? Was Oliver Wray, the enthusiast, right? Can nothing but the utmost self-sacrifice ever reach him?

E. L. H.

COMING EVENTS.

March 25th.—The Infants' Hospital, Vincent Square, S.W.; Annual Court of Governors, at the Hospital, Major-General Lord Cheylesmore in the chair, 4.30 p.m.

March 30th.—The Lord Mayor presides at the Annual Meeting of the East London Nursing Society, the Bishop of Stepney among the speakers, Mansion House, 3 p.m.

March 30th.—Association for Promoting the Training and Supply of Midwives. Fifth Annual Meeting, Caxton Hall (Room 18), Westminster. Sir Charles E. Schwann, Bart., M.P., presiding. 3 p.m.

April 2nd.—Meeting at Chelsea Infirmary, S.W., by invitation of the Matron, Miss Barton, to promote interest in the Territorial Nursing Service. 8 p.m.

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TRAINED NURSES OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

April 7th.—A Meeting of the National Council of Trained Nurses of Great Britain and Ireland will be held at 431, Oxford Street, London, W., on Wednesday, April 7th, 1909, at 3.30 p.m.

AGENDA.

1. Minutes.
2. To receive Reports.
3. To make further arrangements for the International Congress of Nurses.
4. To consider Resolutions for the Agenda of the Quinquennial Meeting of the International Council of Nurses.
5. Other business.

April 16th.—Inaugural Meeting, Certified Midwives' Total Abstinence League, Out-patients' Hall, London Temperance Hospital, Hampstead Road, N.W., 6 to 7 p.m.

April 20th.—Opening of the New Nurses' Home and Out-Patient Department of the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital by Princess Alexander of Teck.

* By Alice Perrin. (Chatto and Windus.)

previous page

next page