

Book of the Week.

BLACK MAGIC.*

No one can have read Miss Bowen's two powerful books, "The Viper of Milan" and "The Glen o' Weeping", without realising that here is a writer who likes to deal with the horrible. These two books are, however, more or less founded on history. The volume before us deals entirely with the mythical and supernatural; it is like a bad dream, and the reader from first to last feels himself in a nightmare, struggling vainly to arrive at some possible and coherent conclusion out of an inchaotic sequence of events; and yet there is such a real grip of interest throughout that, having begun to read, there is no temptation to leave the book till the last words are finished. The opening sentence in a way gives the key-note of the whole. "In a large room of a house in a certain quiet city in Flanders a man was gilding a devil." The close connection between this man and his Satanic Majesty is carried all through the narrative.

Whilst Dirk Renswoude is engaged with his gilding he is interrupted by the entrance of two men. Balthasar of Courtrai comes seeking information about his wife, Ursula of Rooselaare, whom he has never seen, having married her by proxy. He is anxious to find out if she is alive, various reports having reached him, the last place she was supposed to be living in being the house he now is in. Dirk assures him of Ursula's death, showing him her grave in the garden.

It does not take the reader long to find out that Dirk and Ursula are one and the same person. For purposes of her own she conceals her identity. Balthasar's companion, Theirry, is described as extraordinarily beautiful. His personality, and a feeling that this young scholar and he have much in common in their desire to study the occult, induce Dirk to persuade Theirry to part company from Balthasar, and to go with him to Basle to perfect themselves in Black Magic, and here the strange happenings begin. From first to last Dirk's purpose never falters. To accomplish what he has set forth to attain he is absolutely ruthless. The one streak of softness in this otherwise cruel and ambitious nature is his intense and passionate love for Theirry.

That he means to let nothing and no one stand in the way of his ultimate success is clear from the first; that he wishes to carry Theirry with him to the heights is equally clear. Dirk has no doubts. To make of his life what he intends it to be by the aid of Black Magic he unhesitatingly gives himself over to "Sathanas."

With Theirry it is otherwise. Wishing to possess the good things of this world, and not unwilling to help Dirk in his experiments, he still has a shrinking from ultimately losing his soul, a point Dirk does not think worth considering. Over and over again Theirry breaks away from Dirk, even betrays him, but always to be lured back by the strange irresistible hypnotic power Dirk possesses. Having, through their incantations, caused the death of a fellow student at Basle, they fly to Frankfort.

* By Marjorie Bowen. (Alston Rivers.)

Dirk seems to be an embodiment of evil thought, and it is enough to be near him to share the evil when he so wishes it to be. An apparently nice woman suggests to her steward to murder his wife, in order that she may marry him, never having thought of such a thing till she sees Dirk. He assists the Empress to murder her husband so that she may marry another man (Ursula's husband, by the way).

Having nearly murdered a monk so as to steal his money, later on we find Dirk professing deep penitence to this same monk. Entering a monastery, posing as a holy youth, we next see him as a powerful Cardinal, and it is no surprise to find he succeeds in being made Pope.

That we should meet him when he is the great Cardinal, in the streets of Rome, as a girl dancer, clad in orange-coloured draperies, and accompanied by a huge ape, is perhaps amazing, but no doubt to such an adept in Black Magic any transformation is possible.

Miss Bowen has a lively imagination, and she has truly given it full rein in this vivid, lurid, but arresting book.

E. L. H.

SPRING.

Wind of the Western Sea, unfold thy wing,
On thy swift pinions bring to us the Spring.
Bring her with songs and garlands in her train:
Let her soft kisses warm the earth again.
Her magic touch shall clothe the moorland wild:
Bring gladness to the primrose-gathering child.
Hark to the feathered choristers on high:
List' to the lark's song thrilling in the sky.
Watch happy lambkins gambol in their play:
Drink deeply of the perfumed breath of May.
See the grey earth attired in bridal dress.
Wake from her sleep to youth and loveliness.
New hopes arise o'er land, o'er sky, o'er sea,
Fit emblems of man's immortality.

COUNTRY PRACTITIONER.

From *The London Hospital Gazette*.

COMING EVENTS.

May 12th to 14th.—Jubilee Congress of District Nursing, Central Hall, Renshaw Street, Liverpool.

May 13th.—The Prime Minister receives a Deputation, introduced by The Lord Ampthill, G.C.S.I., at the House of Commons in support of the Nurses' Registration Bill, 4.30 p.m.

May 13th to 26th.—Women's Exhibition and Sale of Work, organised by the National Women's Social and Political Union, Prince's Skating Rink, Knightsbridge. Daily, 2.30 to 10.30 p.m.

May 18th and 19th.—British Institute of Social Service. Conference. On Some Aspects of the Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws. To be opened by the Lord Mayor, The Guild Hall Council Chamber, 11.30 a.m. and 3 p.m.

May 18th.—Lecture on Rickets, by Dr. Ralph Vincent, Infants' Hospital, Vincent Square, 5 p.m.

May 29th.—The Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses, Annual Meeting, Medical Society's Rooms, 11, Chandos Street, Cavendish Square, W. Chair, Miss Isla Stewart.

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