

Book of the Week.

THE AFFAIR ON THE BRIDGE.*

It is at times well to read about a people other than our own, especially of one which has at times been so intimately connected with ourselves.

Mr. de Groot has given us a very clever, and, on the whole, pleasant presentment of the inhabitants of Lekveld, a little village not far from Rotterdam. There is a simplicity and directness about the style, which appears well in keeping with the sturdy, somewhat primitive people of whom he writes.

The book is full of interest, all the characters drawn clearly, with unsparing honesty, in relating the mistakes and faults, as well as the virtues of the small community of Dutch folk.

From the very start we are left in no doubt as to who is who, for in the opening page we find the characters tabulated as in a play. One curious peculiarity in the construction is the way the story runs with one set of people for say five years; then we take up the thread of another set, and see what they have been doing meanwhile. Were it not for the remarkable coherence of Mr. de Groot's writing, this might at times be puzzling, and break the interest of the narrative.

The story opens on the farm of Flint, a typical Dutch farmer, or "boer"; "a recognised type of obstinacy and self will." These characteristics seem abnormally developed in Flint. At the same time, he is a clear-sighted, shrewd old man, seeing through his pretty niece Marie, and speaking some fairly hard home truths to her. It is harvest-time, and there is a vivid description of life on the farm. All hands are at work in the fields, we find Marie accepting the attentions of young Ernest Hart, he terribly in earnest, she just amusing herself, not knowing her own mind, and giving him the cold shoulder at her Uncle's bidding, he not considering the young man in a sufficiently good position to marry; in order to better this, Ernest Hart accepts the situation of manager of a plantation at Atchin, in Northern Sumatra, belonging to the Squire of Lekveld.

Following Ernest's fortunes in this Dutch possession, we have some most unpleasant revelations about the natives and their methods. They seem to be perpetually at warfare with the Europeans, only watching their chance to expel them altogether. The experiences young Hart has are most terrible, nearly costing him his life. The description of Atchin, and account of the native trouble, is graphic in the extreme.

The Squire's son, Frank Van Jek, a great friend of Ernest Hart's, finding out that Marie cares nothing for her would-be lover, thinks it no harm to start a flirtation with her, an amusement to which old Flint highly objects. The very evening Ernest leaves for Atchin, Frank and Marie, sitting on the bridge, are surprised by old Flint. He becomes unjust and abusive to Frank, who being of a fiery temper, hits out. The old farmer falls into the water, and, being caught in the mud, rises no more.

* By J. Morgan-de-Groot. (W. Blackwood.)

This is the "Affair on the Bridge," giving the title to the book. Ernest, in passing, hears the high voice and angry words of Flint, but he leaves the country, knowing nothing of the closing scene.

Marie, now mistress of the farm, finds to her chagrin, that Frank cares nothing for her. She will only consent to be silent as to the manner of her uncle's death, if he marries her, and this he declines doing. Here we have some interesting chapters, giving us an insight into the legal procedure in Holland. It is all clearly told, and very curious some of it appears. The first law of Nature is doubtless self-preservation, and certainly Frank makes a good fight for liberty, and one is not sorry that Marie gets the worst of it. The relations between the Squire and his son are delightfully described, their simple affection for each other is beautiful. Into their life comes Eve Martin, the orphan daughter of the former Dominé of the village. She is an altogether charming girl, her gentle sincere nature so utterly different to Marie's vain, ill-balanced disposition.

This is a book to be heartily recommended. A well told, interesting story, containing quite a fund of information.

E. L. H.

VERSES.

Age after age the fruit of knowledge falls
To ashes on men's lips;
Love fails, faith sickens; like a dying tree.
Life sheds its dreams that no new spring recalls;
The longed-for ships
Come empty home or founder in the deep,
And eyes first lose their tears and then their sleep.

So weary a world it lies, forlorn of day,
And yet not wholly dark,
Since evermore some soul that missed the mark
Calls back to those agropes
In the mad maze of hope,
"Courage, my brothers, I have found the way."

And one by one
The leaders in the strife
Fall on the blade of failure and exclaim:
"The day is won!"

From Artemis to Actæon and Other Verses,
By EDITH WHARTON.

WORD FOR THE WEEK.

A man who takes the betterment of humanity for his aim and end must also take the daily experiences of humanity for the constant correction of his process. He must not only test and guide his achievement by human experience, but he must succeed or fail in proportion as he has incorporated that experience with his own. Otherwise his own achievements become his stumbling block, and he comes to believe in his own goodness as something outside of himself. . . . He forgets that it is necessary to know the lives of our contemporaries, not only to believe in their integrity but in order to attain any mental or moral integrity for ourselves or any such hope for society.

JANE ADDAMS.

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