

## REVIEW.

## "THE COMMON GROWTH."

"The common growth of Mother Earth  
Suffices me—her tears, her mirth,  
Her humblest mirth and tears."

—Wordsworth.

All Miss Loane's books deserve study for the reason that she knows the poor intimately, and presents her knowledge to us in an eminently readable form. There is not a dry page in "The Common Growth," to which we have already directed our readers' attention, and which is published by Mr. Edward Arnold, 41 and 43, Maddox Street, London, W.

Perhaps one of the best chapters in the book is that containing the story of "A Woman Super-tramp," who tells it in her own words: "My people was the most respectable kind that is—the sort that tells you the theatre is the devil's front parlour, and cards is his picture-books, and they'd sooner see their daughter in her grave than married to a soldier. I never gainsaid 'em, and all went well enough till the circus come to the town, and then I was mad to join it. Mother an' father told me it 'ud be good-bye for ever if I did; but you can't go against your fate. The boss and his wife were glad enough to get me, for I was small-made and active, and full of spirit. They taught me to dance and sing, and ride and jump through a hoop, and I went with them from place to place. I never tired of the life. People say you do, but not when it's in the blood, as it was with me. I'd live every day of it again if I could, always passing on and seeing something new; the inside of a week was the most we spent anywhere. I married the man that had charge of the elephants, and we had two children—a boy and a girl. I never was what you might call a very good temper, but we jogged on all right, and I was as happy as could be till something went wrong with my leg. What it was I don't know, but the pain got worse and worse, and at last I found myself in a big London hospital. They knew the leg was my living, and they was as patient as could be, and they tried this and they tried that, but nothing was any good. The doctors got thicker round my bed, and I knew things couldn't be going well, and it made my nerves bad. After the life I'd led, to lie in one room day and night for over a year. . . . And then, when you felt wild with restlessness, it was something dreadful to have the lights turned down at half-past eight, and not a word more to be spoke, and perhaps 'twould be hours before you could sleep, and all the others snoring till you felt mad with them. And then, just as you'd dropped off to sleep, you'd wake with a start, and find a bad accident case brought in, or a suicide with a couple of policemen; or they'd be putting screens round a bed, and presently the porters would bring something in covered with a flag, and you knew 'twas a coffin; or they'd have a stretcher, and take someone off to the theatre,

and then presently you'd hear all the weak talk and crying while they was getting over the sleeping stuff. If I'd been what they call a medical patient, I should have had a quieter time, but then I should have been with such a down-in-the-mouth set; you have to look at both sides of a thing before you know how you stand."

However, in spite of all the care she received, the "Super-tramp" lost her leg. She relates: "Before I had the operation I wrote to my people, but they sent the letter back just tore in three pieces. Well, I don't complain; I made my bed, and I must lie on it."

And misfortunes, which have a way of coming together, lived up to their reputation. "One of the elephants had struck my husband across the face with its trunk, and there was he nearly blind, and with two young children on his hands. . . . The day I was discharged from hospital he was outside to meet me. He was nearly blind and hadn't a penny, and only the clothes he stood up in; but any port in a storm. A husband's some good even if 'tis only to lay your hand on his shoulder and walk along by. It was raining, and my husband was a bit down, as you might expect, but I thought it just heaven to be out of doors and free. 'What's to be done,' he says. 'I know what *isn't* to be done,' I says; 'We'll never see the inside of a workhouse as long as I can crawl.' They'd given me a leg—£22 it cost—but I was too weak to bear the weight of it. It was cruel heavy, and that obstropolous I didn't ever seem to know which way it was going to walk, so I parted with it for a pair of crutches."

So our heroine bravely started as a street seller. "I'd always been good at sewing. It was the chief of what I learnt in my own home, and in the circus there was for ever something wanting a stitch, from the man monkey's tail to the boss's wife's bonnet, so I'd kept my hand in."

At first it was a very hard struggle, with 4s. 3d. to pay for a furnished room, but some ladies, who got to know the brave woman on her "pitch" found her an unfurnished room close by, and gave her furniture, and 11s. to "buy what was missing, and it went on a second-hand bed, a mattress, and a fender. . . . When the things come, some of them in clothes-baskets and some in a hand-cart, there was even pictures and a few ornaments for the mantelshelf and a muslin blind for the window, and I began to think it was the first home I'd ever had since I joined the circus."

The whole story should be read, and Miss Loane's summing up is worthy of note:—"Not the least of the many morals that may be drawn from my friend's 'veridicous history' is that the sum of £22 spent on her without due consideration was absolutely wasted, while the results of the careful expenditure of 11s., and the gift of what was to the original owners mere lumber, is equivalent to a life pension of 2s. 9d. a week, not counting the comfort and dignity of 'a home of your own' compared to the wretchedness of such a furnished lodging as can be obtained for 4s. 3d."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)