

THE SEVENTH MARCHIONESS OF RIVIÈRE.

I have been arguing with a dear slum Sister and find her unconvinced.

"Oh! I know all about it," she flings out impatiently, "but I can't rise to it—you may keep the lot. Bees, birds, butterflies, seeds, trees, flowers, skies, stars, seas, music, art, drama, food, frippery and fudge. They all go to make up life, I know, but they are not essentials. Give me human beings—souls and bodies—I find them the only vitally absorbing things in the world."

"How about books? You have not swept them off the board with other unconsidered crumbs?" I ask.

"No," she replies. "Books I must have, but when I read I want to read about live people—you may keep all the 'style' and 'atmosphere.' I can't appreciate them a bit. Don't say it is all vulgar curiosity, because it isn't."

"I didn't speak," I answer mildly.

"Then don't look it—I don't want literature, and I am weary of education and registration, and status, and the whole academic environment. I crave for human interest, and when you told that telepathic tale about how you became Matron of Barts., I simply could not wait for my B.J.N. to be delivered, I had to run to the paper shop and fetch it. Why don't you give us a human chapter every week? Something with the vital spark in it?"

I smile.

"Hearts'-blood," I venture.

"Oh! yes, for sure there must be hearts'-blood, or there will be no humanity in it," my critic agrees.

When the dear Philistine has departed, trudging home to save her 'bus fare, so that she may spend all her splendid vitality and every penny she can spare on the "humans" she adores, I sit and wonder.

Buried in a box which has not been opened for sixteen years are bundles of notes and scraps written in callow youth. I shudder as I think of them, but I have never summoned up courage to consign them to the flames. I know it is sixteen years since they were overturned, because in 1895 I extracted and published a chapter from this dusty pile.

Presently I go upstairs and open the box. There, undisturbed, are the various packets.

Why, why stir the poignant memories of the past, long since quiescent, if not forgotten?

I shut down the lid.

Then I seem to hear a familiar voice, long since silenced, suggesting:

"Tell them the story of the 'Seventh Marchioness of Rivière.'"

"There never was a Seventh Marchioness of Rivière," I answer silently.

"Not in this world."

Again I open the box. In the left corner is a packet labelled "Andrea. Dictated 187-."

I lift it out and open it. The manuscript it contains is discoloured, the ink rusty. In what queer little characters the matter is transcribed. Can it have been written by my hand? I sit on the floor and begin to read. I go on reading,—I become absorbed. Is it possible that a document is interesting because it is true? That even if crude, a human record never becomes stale? I skip many chapters, lingering over others, until I come to one headed "The Seventh Marchioness of Rivière." This I read from beginning to end. Is it actually nearly forty years ago since I wrote down, at the suggestion of "Andrea" these things which might have been written yesterday! Why not?

Red is for ever the colour of hearts'-blood!

Next week I will tell you something about "Andrea," in so far as it leads to the psychological interlude concerning "The Seventh Marchioness of Rivière," who never existed!

ETHEL G. FENWICK.

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"RIPE CORN."*

It is indeed refreshing to come across a story of such rare charm as this. Those of our readers who are familiar with the writings of George Eliot cannot fail to be struck with the resemblance in style to that immortal novelist. One might almost venture to compare "Ripe Corn" to the "Mill on the Floss." Of the many characters there is not one that does not live, and live vividly. Each one is sketched with a marvellous power of delineation. "Jane of the curls!" Why, after meeting her for the first time one can no more think of Jane without her curls than of the curls without Jane. Here is a picture of her. "On the opposite bank of the river set sheer against the glory of the sky sat a thin, small creature of a girl. . . . Brown her short frock, with frillings of white discernible about the knees, brown her hat, which was wide of brim and had something the appearance of a poke bonnet, because from under it she had pulled a long curl either side her ears and tied them beneath her chin. The remaining curls—there were five—hung sedately waistward. The small face delicately white, like plum blossom, was set in a frame of brown, nearest akin to fallen beech leaves."

None but a genius could have created the vicarage family. Mrs. Trankett, who "was not pretty exactly," her lover husband, Missie and Theodore, their children. How could Mrs. Trankett grow old? She had everything she wanted and the only middle-aged people she knew intimately were Missie and Theodore." Then Tom Laqueste, who came of old yeomen stock, who loved Jane and married Missie, and fine old widow Matchett, and Jane's sweet invalid,

* By S. C. Nethersole. (Mills & Boon, London, W.)

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