

"thoroughly undemocratic." The more intelligent women have to do with these sad defectives, the better chance they have of recovery, or at least of conditions where they will not be an element in the deterioration of the national health.

## BOOK OF THE WEEK.

### THE LIFE MASK.\*

This work is from end to end chiefly morbid reflection on a terrible episode. True the episode was a sufficient excuse for morbidity; indeed, one could hardly conceive any mind strong enough to throw off evident marks of such a terrible experience as was the unhappy lot of Nita Lippincott. Whether such a depressing subject justifies the trouble and skill spent upon it by its author is another matter. However, as some natures really enjoy being made miserable, it will no doubt find many admirers. Apart from the subject the description of the visit to Spain, and the fascination of old Sarah's character are in themselves a justification of the book.

Written in the first person, it opens with mystery which is not explained till far on in the story.

Nita and Sarah her maid. "I was afraid to fall asleep the night after Sarah Nicholls brought me home to the little house by the sea. I thought 'If I dream the gray dream here there is no hope for me anywhere.' Nearly every night of the years I wished to forget, the dream had come in the moment of dropping asleep, and I had started up, struggling to shake it off, as though it were some remorseless living thing. Sarah had chosen Margate for my sake. The air I knew was supposed to be a tonic. Perhaps, too, she had secretly thought that its liveliness would do me good. I longed for southern blues and greens and rich orange-gold, but I said nothing of this to Sarah. I felt it would be better to die in the little home her love had made rather than let her know her devotion had been in vain." Nothing so far is said as to the reason of the necessity for Sarah providing a home for her young mistress. But Sarah, who worshipped her, discovers her longing for the south, and the little home so lovingly prepared is let, and the pair migrate to Granada.

"I looked at my watch, a present from Sarah. 'I don't think I can wait till to-morrow. Only I don't like going to the Alhambra without you.' 'You needn't mind me,' she assured me. 'One place is mighty near the same to me as another as long as you're happy. I'd as lief see it to-morrow, and I reckon I wouldn't shed tears if 'twasn't till the day after.'"

Sarah is really delightful, so prodigal of her love and gifts. She made two separate lists

\* By the author of "He Who Passed." William Heinemann: London.

for the rooms—one of the things she must get, and another of the things it would be nice to have.

"She looked at me with her loving tremulous smile, that made one side of the prettily prim mouth go up higher than the other.

"'I'm mighty glad you're happy, dearie. But if you're goin' to *stay* happy there ought to be someone else in the garden besides me.'"

And when the someone else came explanation was inevitable. Nita confesses to him that she is the notorious Anita Durrand who had served ten years for the murder of her husband, the old man, whom she had loathed.

The plot at this point is cleverly constructed. She had undertaken to watch by his sick bed, had fallen into a condition of semi-sleeping and waking, had believed that the figure bending over her husband with the fatal dose was herself, had suffered the double punishment of imprisonment and remorse for all these cruel years.

And then a surprising thing happens. Sarah confesses to Hugh that it was *she* who poisoned the old man, who had made her darling wretched, and then her courage had failed. From sheer cowardice she had suffered Nita to be the victim. The conclusion of the book is very painful. At first Nita refuses to see her, though Sarah is unconscious of her knowledge of the facts.

"Dearie, I've brought that egg and milk. I won't ask to come in."

Later Nita relents, and visits her in her room.

"She sat quite still, tired out with grief, the little old woman who had loved me, then wronged me, and loved me through all. I laid my hand on the bowed gray head with its neat cap and tuft of ribbon. 'How pathetic a back it is,' I thought, 'and how defenceless it looks, somehow.'"

But Sarah was dead. "I was not unhappy nor shocked, for the smile on the little prim face was too sweet."

H. H.

## COMING EVENTS.

August 4th and 5th.—National Association for the Prevention of Infant Mortality and for the Welfare of Infancy. Conference on Infant Mortality, Caxton Hall, Westminster. 10 to 1 and 2 to 5.

August 4th and 5th.—National Association for the Prevention of Consumption and other forms of Tuberculosis. Fifth Annual Conference, Central Hall, Westminster, London.

August 6th to 12th.—International Congress of Medicine. Albert Hall, London University.

## A WORD FOR THE WEEK.

Give me good work to do, that I may forget myself and find peace in doing it for Thee. Though I am poor, send me to carry some gift to those who are poorer, some cheer to those who are more lonely.—*Henry Van Dyke.*

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)