

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"WEEDS."*

"A weed, according to an old definition, is a flower growing out of its proper place"—so we are told in the preface. Indeed, we feel tempted to quote alone from the preface, which is the key of the pages that follow. It drives home emphatically that "Weeds" is a book with a purpose, not a mere figment of the imagination.

"The cruelty of the situation" (which is set before the reader in the pages), "can never be sufficiently emphasised. The very women who have been brought up with the idea that woman is a queen born to be loved, honoured and cherished, have to go to situations where they are treated with a total absence of chivalry, and are not given a dog's chance."

"Weeds deals with the vicissitudes of three women—Lesley Brydges, Agnes Openshaw and Mary Strange—who would all of them have made admirable hostesses in the houses of their husbands or their fathers, had they continued in the sphere wherein they were born. Much of the book is taken up with the struggles of these women, which threaten to be hopeless."

Mr. Sladen goes on to tell us that his co-author, Miss Potter, has for some time lived in the colony of educated women without a practical training, who are battling for existence in London. "Among these women," he says, "are God knows how many sweet and beautiful flowers, though they are treated as weeds, because they have no place in the 'trim social garden' of modern civilisation." Lesley Brydges is first introduced to us in inspiring surroundings of Assisi. True, it was not at the summit of her worldly prospects—for she, a petted only child, had then been supplanted in her home by a step-mother, and was fresh from witnessing the death of her father in a distressing accident. Thus she becomes a "weed." We next meet her in the drawing-room of Buckingham Palace Club, where, with other girls and inmates, she was charged twenty-one shillings a week and upwards for her board and lodging. She meets there Agnes Openshaw—full of vitality and magnetism and a splendid *joie de vivre*; Mary Strange, shabbily dressed, but with a grace reminiscent of ancient Greek sculpture. She was slow of speech where Agnes was quick, gentle where Agnes was vital.

From the first, Agnes's gay and pleasure-loving nature made her snatch at the goods the gods provided in the shape of Dolly Illington—of whom she said, flippantly, that he was the rich young man, without whom it was difficult to enter into *her* kingdom of Heaven. The inevitable for her happened; and afterwards, when he left her, to make a marriage of convenience, she says bitterly, "If I were a man, the world would say nothing, because, when it comes to that,

Dolly is much worse than I am, and the world pats Dolly on the back, and calls him a good boy. Whatever people may say or think, they cannot make me worse than I am. I was starving for sunlight, and he gave me power to stay out in it from morning till night, instead of being cramped in an office till the light was gone."

Lesley wins through, in spite of her acceptance of Bohemian suppers, dances and presents; in spite of the temptation to do as Agnes had done. She bravely fights as secretary, shop girl, companion, governess, house-parlourmaid; and receives her reward when Peter Webbe, her friend of happier days, at last tells her of his faithful love.

Mary is the type to whom to err in the way of Agnes would be impossible; but her sympathy goes out to her. Lesley quotes to her from a French author she once met. "It is the virtue of your Englishwomen which astonishes me; some of them are quite beautiful, because they have no *dot*, and do not marry, they work all their lives like machines. Such a thing would be impossible in France."

"If low wages stand for anything, there is not much inducement for morality," said Mary, drily.

"But you don't advocate that way of escape, Mary?"

"Good heavens, no! only it sickens me that such a state of things can exist."

COMING EVENTS.

November 21st.—Nurses' Missionary League. Lecture by Miss Jane Walker, M.D., on "The Opportunity of Womanhood." Chairman, Miss Puxley, 33, Bedford Square, W.C. 3 p.m. Nurses cordially invited. Tea, 4.15 p.m.

November 24th.—Irish Nurses Association. Lecture, "Massage in diseases of the Circulation," by Dr. Douglas Good, 34, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin, 7.30 p.m.

November 26th.—Queen Victoria Jubilee Institute. Lecture on the "Treatment and Prevention of Tuberculosis." Royal Victoria Dispensary, Edinburgh. 4 p.m.

November 26th.—The Association of Approved Societies: Conference on the Nursing of Insured Persons, Caxton Hall, Council Chamber; Charles Bathurst, Esq., M.P., in chair, 2.30 p.m.

November 27th.—The National Council of Trained Nurses: Annual Meeting, Medical Society's Rooms, 11, Chandos Street, London, W.; meetings, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 2.30 to 4.30 p.m., tea; the Isla Stewart Oration, "The Power of Example," by Miss Mollett, 5.30 p.m.

November 28th.—Nurses' Missionary League. Lecture by Mrs. Douglas Thornton on "The Missionary Aspect of the Woman's Movement." Chairman, Miss J. Macfee, B.A. 33, Bedford Square, W.C. 3 p.m. Nurses cordially invited. Tea, 4.15 p.m.

November 29th.—The League of St. Bartholomew's Hospital Nurses: General Meeting, Clinical

* By Olave Potter and Douglas Sladen. (Hurst & Blackett.)

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