

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"HELEN IN LOVE,"*

The state of Helen's attitude towards the tender emotion occupies herself, and incidentally the reader, throughout the whole volume. Self-analysis is very much the fashion of the present-day writer. We have a suspicion that Mr. Arnold Bennett set the fashion in this particular, but it is apt to become tiresome if restraint is not exercised. Frankly we confess that many of Helen's complicated thoughts and conversations are as undecipherable to us as the Greek inscription which forms the dedication, and we are left wondering whether they are beyond our powers or whether they mean anything at all. But having said this, "Helen in Love" is by no means unattractive, and having begun to read one is obliged to follow her tortuous ways with a good deal of interest. Helen is by no means the only interesting person in the book; her family and their doings are certainly unusual, and the unusual is a great asset in fiction.

Helen from her early youth had dreams and aspirations. Her habit of mind and temperament raised her above the girls of her own circle and made her discontented with the circumstances of her life. From time to time she realised that if she would make for happiness she must do as others did, and that aspirations rarely made for contentment. With this end in view she consulted with Milly how she managed to get acquainted with the young men of the place and to have what appeared such very enjoyable times with them.

She had resolved to dip her own fingers into this dish of vulgar joy.

"At three o'clock Helen appeared on the beach. Her pigtail was tied with a festal bow of white. Her face was determined but pale. Arrived there she was possessed with an agony of doubt and uncertainty, but later she scraped an acquaintance with a harmless young man sitting by a breakwater.

"Helen braced herself for the effort. 'Good afternoon,' she said, fiercely.

"The young man seemed surprised. 'Good afternoon,' he gave her back again. He had a pleasant voice.

"He sat up and considered her. 'It's very jolly here in the sun,' he suggested when he had finished considering her. 'I say,' he said, 'Did you make a mistake? Did you think I was someone else?' He talked with her for some time and read Meredith's poems to her, but that even did not make him interesting. By and by he realised that the girl wanted to flirt with him and he obliged her, but only in a half-hearted way, for he was quite a nice boy. This was Hugh, who became the dream of her life. He was an officer in a good regiment and not at all in Helen's

class. Moreover he was but a visitor and went away the next day leaving no clue to his whereabouts.

"She had gathered that his opinion of her was poor before they parted.

"Do you mean I oughtn't to have spoken to you. Everybody else does. Why shouldn't I?"

"Her distress was pitiable. He took both her hands.

"Of course I don't, my dear," he said; 'it's all right. I told you before it was awfully nice of you. I was awfully lonely before you came.'"

Helen's father was by way of being an artist. He had married a contriving, bustling woman rather beneath him. She was honest and sincere, but terrifying of tongue.

Helen's next inspiration was Persis Alleyne, a young, beautiful, married woman who rented a country cottage near her home.

Helen, who with all her self-consciousness was yet unsensitive, forced an acquaintance with her and by gentle insistence became her friend. By so doing she was enabled to mix with the class that she had always coveted knowing.

They were not of great benefit to her, for they were of a worldly and almost fast type. In addition to what she considered her good fortune, her father became suddenly well off, so that our friend Helen at last had the opportunities she so ardently desired.

But in all these vicissitudes she was more or less faithful to the memory of Hugh, although as she was an attractive and clever girl she did not lack for admirers.

Of course it would have been quite a mistake if eventually Hugh and she had not met again. It cannot be denied that their engagement was mostly due to Helen's determination, but he was really quite a dull young man. The story leaves us with a feeling that its author had drifted through it in the same rather meaningless way that she conducts her heroine through her love affairs.

H. H.

THE SEA.

I will go back to the great sweet mother,
Mother and lover of men, the sea.
I will go down to her, I and none other,
Close with her, kiss her, and mix her with me;
Cling to her, strive with her, hold her fast;
O fair white mother, in days long past,
Born without sister, born without brother,
Set free my soul as thy soul is free.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.

WORD FOR THE WEEK.

Have you ever had your path suddenly turn sunshiny because of a cheerful word? Have you ever wondered if this could be the same world because someone had been unexpectedly kind to you? You can make to-day the same for somebody.

*By Amber Reeves. Hurst & Blackett London.

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