

BOOK OF THE WEEK.**"BINDWEED."***

There is always a pleasurable anticipation for a first novel, and when—as is the case with this one—the author is announced as a niece of Charles Kingsley and a cousin of Lucas Malet, readers may feel fairly well assured that they will get something up to standard, if not far above it.

"Bindweed" is a powerful story, and assures the fame of its creator. It has a definite purpose. As the foreword denotes, "Passion is a hideous bindweed, which, when it has flowered, withers away, leaving nothing behind it; but love is the true vine, which, binding in holy wedlock, brings fruit into the world." We are grateful to Miss Vallings that, in her virgin soil, she has planted a high moral standard, backed by deeply religious convictions. This is not a goody, goody book—let us make no mistake about that—for it portrays unflinchingly life as it is, life as it existed in gay Paris before a hint of the terrors of war. Miss Vallings discloses not only high literary talent, but also an intimate knowledge of the musical and artistic world generally. The story tells of the discovery of a future prima donna by a great singer in the slums of Paris, and her début under her patronage. Madame Périnot is a creation—a charming, lovable, wholesome creation—and she is introduced to the reader, whilst summing up her charms in the mirror. "Forty-five! decidedly, she was handsome; the best was good." The best included good features, charming dimples, successfully treated hair of brilliant copper colour—a singer from her early years, a child of the peasantry. She had married a wealthy man, who died after some years, leaving her again penniless. At the time the story opens, she has again won moderate comfort and ease by the teaching of her art, and supports her old peasant mother who lives with her. And then she discovered Eugénie, the girl dressmaker with the wonderful voice. Eugénie, in her turn, is the child of an illicit love of a lady's maid and an Italian nobleman. Her mother returned broken-hearted to her fierce, devoted sister, Victorine, who sat all day in the market and sold her goods. A coarse, unprepossessing old virago, she nevertheless guarded the young Eugénie with fierce and jealous care, ever with fearful forebodings that she would follow the fate of her mother. Judge then how she received the supplication of this convent-bred child, that she might be trained as an operatic singer.

Violently she opposes the suggestion. "You will always be deceived, my girl, for you will never suspect ill of anyone; for my part, I think it is more profitable to suspect ill—so that one may unexpectedly come across an honest person."

M. Hypolite, also an operatic singer, is described as not really a bad man (we cannot quite agree to

that); a *bon viveur* in many ways, but a fastidious one.

He plays a great part in the story, and his pursuit of Eugénie in spite of the vigilance of her chaperone, Mme. Périnot, is one of the several romances of the story. Her joyous acceptance of his love is cruelly disillusioned when she finds that he has no thought of marriage.

"She was filled with anguish. Gaston, how she loved him! But now all that which had seemed so beautiful became a matter of shame." In a touching letter she says that "for those who love, marriage is but the link that binds them in chains most beautiful. For those who love like this, age cannot touch them, disease cannot disfigure. But will you try to understand I am the kind of woman to whom only the greatest love is acceptable?"

There is a terrible and lurid ending to the book. The mad and coarse Victorine, who has indulged her suspicions of Hypolite and Eugénie till she is beyond control, sought to silence the voice that she believed to be her niece's downfall. She remembered in a flash Eugénie's telling her of two little cords that lay within her throat. In the midst of this horrible scene comes Hypolite, and the woman's fury turns upon him. The struggle results in the death of the old, kindly priest, Abbé Goujon, and finally in the suicide of Victorine. Out of all this horror Hypolite finds his true manhood, and his love for Eugénie an honourable termination. He confesses "that there is no peace, no freedom but that of eternal union."

The sweet pastoral wedding of Marie-Anne and Jacques is the occasion of a visit from her kinswoman, the great singer, who good-naturedly accompanies her peasant mother. In secret, however, she rebels. "Sapristi!" she exclaimed, "what possessed me to come here? I cannot play at simplicity when there are no comforting footlights to aid my deception. . . . I have a wolf's hunger on me. If I lived here every remnant of my pride would go, together with the strings of my corsets."

And a year later Jacques came running down the path, and as he ran he leapt into the air. His face was red and his lips moved, but no speech came

"Speak!" cried Marguerite. "Marie?"

"She is well." His voice came hoarsely. "He is born; my son is born. Ah! he is beautiful, my own little man-child, and strong—strong as a little bull."

Miss Vallings writes of life from many aspects, and they are always interesting

H. H.

WORD FOR THE WEEK.

Let that which is to come, be as it may,
Darkness, extinction, justice, life intense,
The flies are happy in the summer day,
They will be happy many summers hence.

"Sonnets and Poems,"

John Masefield.

* By Gabrielle Vallings. (London: Hutchinson & Co.)

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