

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"THE CHASTE WIFE." *

"It was a very hot day in the middle of summer. The sky was cloudless, and as Priscilla lay in the hammock under a big mulberry tree she seemed to hear the whole garden droning with the song of busy bees bumbling as it were with satisfaction at a harvest so happily plentiful. Near to Priscilla were two young men, both of whom were in flannels, as though they had either been playing or were about to play tennis.

But the two young men made no stir in the direction of their game—the one because he was in love with Priscilla, the other because he was an unusually lazy person.

There were many flowers in the sunny part of the garden. Romeo, a little cat, "toyed fancifully with a crawling insect upon a neighbouring path."

This very attractive picture of well-being was not for Priscilla long after she is introduced to the reader.

Dorothy Moore about the same time was sitting by an open window in a room near the Upper Street, Islington, waiting for her brother Stephen to join her. She lifted her hands to look at the lines on their palms and their already work-worn fingers.

She forced her eyes away to a contemplation of the brown wall-paper. "Years hence," she thought, "I'll tell Stephen how I hate brown as a colour. Perfectly filthy it is." Could anyone take an interest in this ugly old place. It was something to be loathed and never in all her days to be escaped.

It was from these depressing surroundings that the young journalist Stephen loomed upon the horizon of beautiful and fortunate Priscilla Evandine, captured her fancy and married her with little or no opposition from her prosperous parents, and the endowment of attractive well-being disappears.

Hilary Bandoureau, the young man in the tennis flannels, and the well-filled purse, is left to swallow his chagrin as best he may.

Besides Stephen's poverty, he has a skeleton in the cupboard in the shape of a worthless old father, who is possessed of the knowledge of an episode in Stephen's life with which Priscilla is unacquainted.

In other ways Stephen is quite honest with Priscilla, as a letter written to her before her marriage shows. Alluding to her parents he says:

"They're both splendid, but would they draw the line at me. They must have had quite other ideas. They couldn't want you to marry a shabby failure. If they did we should have to persuade them, shouldn't we? I should like you to see my house. It would be a shock; but after that you would certainly know once and for all whether you could bear to marry me."

* By Frank Swinnerton. Martin Secker, London.

Priscilla's love survived the shock, and later we find them happily established in a little home of their own that was neither luxurious nor sordid.

"He loved Priscilla above all things. Entering the pretty room with its sparse furniture, he found the atmosphere reassuring. His pleasure at seeing Priscilla there, in a very simple dress of blue linen with her delicate, fair face and fair hair looking so adorable, was intense.

"Her clear eyes, her indescribably candid manner, her small head, her grace, all these moved him deeply."

A jarring note in the book is the bad taste of both Stephen and Dorothy in the way they speak of their father. True, he was a worthless old scoundrel, but his condemnation should have been left to other lips than those of his son and daughter.

The whole book impresses one with the idea of indefiniteness, as though the author had strung together quite interesting incident without any very clear idea of the issue.

The title is misleading, and not one that would guide one in recommending it. But the tale is quite sound and free from objection.

There is much literary merit in its style, but one lays down the volume with the feeling of having arrived nowhere. Priscilla was, no doubt, "a chaste wife," but there seems to have been no particular reason why she should not have been, for surely a temporary misunderstanding with her husband would not have been a sufficient excuse for the contrary.

H. H.

COMING EVENTS.

January 26th.—The Matrons' Council: Annual Meeting, 4.0 p.m.; Tea, 5.0; Discussion. 431, Oxford Street, London, W.

January 27th.—Meeting in the Royal College of Physicians, Dublin. To discuss the College of Nursing, Ltd. Dr. O'Carroll will preside. 5 p.m.

January 31st.—The Royal Sanitary Institute, Session 1917. Discussion: "The Physical Welfare of Children after Infancy from National, Social, and Public Health Standpoints," to be opened by W. Leslie Mackenzie, M.A., M.D. Chair, Sir George Newman, M.D., D.P.H., 90, Buckingham Palace Road. 4.30 p.m.

February 3rd.—National Union of Trained Nurses: Annual Meeting of London Branch, 46, Marsham Street, Westminster, 2.45; Address on Nurses' Registration Bills, 3.30 p.m.

WORD FOR THE WEEK.

"Don't worry! To worry about the past is to dig up a grave; let the corpse lie. To worry about the future is to dig your own grave; let the undertaker attend to that. The present is the servant of your Will."—Haddock.

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