

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"A LONDON POSY."*

This charming story can claim originality, as it tells of a certain house in Fleet Street, once the home of Goldsmith. In the preface the author tenders her gratitude to Mr. Cecil Harmsworth, M.P., to whom she dedicates her book for rescuing "from decay and threatened destruction a house sacred to the memory of one of London's most faithful lovers."

An educated woman with her brother, in this chronicle, are the fictitious care-takers of this historic house. Anne Constant tends it with devoted and romantic affection. "Despite her forty-two years, she had a certain air of audacious coquetry which brought her frequent male admirers—admirers who came to flirt and who stayed to be pals."

The brother and sister are a very interesting couple, especially in their dealings with each other.

Anne had returned after a fortnight's absence in the country, and, after her eager fashion, plied her reserved brother with questions.

"Well, how's everything?" she said, as the taxi lurched out of Paddington station into Praed Street.

"All right," said George, with the air of considering the question superfluous.

"That's what you said on that beastly post card, and are you aware that you put a penny stamp on it?"

"There wasn't a halfpenny stamp in the house," he explained.

"I suppose it never occurred to you that you might write me a letter?"

"No, it didn't," he admitted.

"O! aren't the searchlights lovely?" she exclaimed, "and the streets in this weird shadow? It's good to be back to the thrill of the Zepps."

From which it may be seen that Anne was an incurable Londoner.

Her first duty on her return was to make a tour of her beloved "House."

"There was a different silence from that of the country she had left—that had been a silence full of the promise of teeming life, this was one of folded hands and ghostly echoes set in motion by voices long since stilled."

A woman with Anne's large heart would be sure to attract children, and "Thomas" is a piece of delightful portraiture.

He was the child of Rachel Challis, a Jewess, who supported herself and her three children by the sweated industry of blouse-making.

Little Thomas's life was a tragedy—he was the ceaseless slave of his small twin brother and sister.

Poor Thomas knew no respite from his drudgery. Mr. Sabbatini, the old clothes' dealer with

whom his mother lodged, sympathised, but was unable to ameliorate his lot.

"Thomas continued to sidle towards the door. On the other side was freedom. Freedom on Saturday afternoon, with steam-boats going off to Putney and Kew from Westminster Pier; a low tide for catching tiddlers; and, maybe, a paddle, not to speak of the society of boys of his own age."

But these delights were not for Thomas, and it was a very gloomy escort who sallied forth with the twins half-an-hour later. He had been robbed of his afternoon's play; moreover, he had been bathed—a rite which necessitated an avoidance of any occupation worth following for the next two or three hours.

Poor little Thomas! his short life came to an end before he had tasted the joys of other children of his age. He abandoned his post as keeper of the twins one night and sallied forth in a delirious anticipation of Zepps, and the small deserter met his death in the raid that followed.

George and Iris have a pretty love story, and Anne has the satisfaction of at least knowing that she is loved by the "gentle essayist," but his ill-health is a bar to their marriage. She writes him a whimsical and pathetic letter when he is gone overseas.

"You ask if your 'London Pride' still flourishes? She does, but she misses one small figure from her circle.

"There's a wistful little face which she often sees in her imagination as she goes about her work in the house. Thomas has gone over to the side of the ghosts, but with them I think he sometimes returns. Well, he will always find a welcome, so long as Anne Constant remains here, and I can see no other future for her."

We leave Anne Constant alone with her beloved ghosts of the old frequenters of the House—Dr. Johnson, Boswell, and the rest. "She trod softly, going down and down a shadow among shadows. When she reached the hall, she peeped into the letter box. It was empty, and she thought of the dirty little notes from Thomas she used to find there. Never again would they meet her questing eye. 'I don't believe anyone has missed that child more than I have,' she said to herself."

We imagine no one can read this book without registering a resolution to make acquaintance with the old house on which this charming romance is built.

H. H.

WORD FOR THE WEEK.

Even in the meanest sorts of labour, the whole soul of a man is composed into a kind of real harmony the instant he begins to work.

—Carlyle.

The soul shall struggle and stand
In the end swift and free
As the stars, as the wind, as the night,
As the sun, as the sea.

—Barlow.

*By Sophie Cole. London: Mills & Boon, Ltd.

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