

## BOOK OF THE WEEK.

## THE WHITE LADIES OF WORCESTER.\*

"The White Ladies of Worcester," by Mrs. Florence Barclay, is a surprising book, for it is no less than the love story of the beautiful Prioress of the White Ladies, and when men or women solemnly dedicate themselves to the religious life they should put human love away and keep those vows inviolate, if they wish for happiness here and hereafter.

If there can be extenuating circumstances for broken vows, they were certainly present in this case.

Sir Hugh D'Argent and Mora, the Countess of Norelle, his betrothed, had parted when, at the call of duty, he followed his King to the Great Crusade, with every pledge of undying devotion.

"I would I left thee wife, not maid," he said. "Could I have wed thee first, I would have gone with a lighter heart."

"Wife or maid," she answered, her face lifted to his, "I am all thine own. Go with a light heart, dear man of mine, for it makes no difference. Maid or wife, I am thine and none other's, for ever."

But later the lovers had apparently irrefutable evidence of each other's faithlessness. Hugh that his affianced bride had married another, and Mora that her betrothed had wedded his cousin.

The knight, despair in his heart, went out to battle and "fought like a mad wild beast," was often wounded, and later taken prisoner, had years of adventure, and finally belonging to "a line of fighters and hunters, men to whom pride of race and love of hearth and home are primal instincts," he returned to England and learned of the treachery which had robbed him of his betrothed; also that she had entered a strictly enclosed Order—that of the White Ladies of Worcester—and was already its Prioress. "The youngest Prioress in the kingdom," said the Bishop, his informant, "yet none could be wiser or better fitted to hold high authority." By strategy the knight made his way into the presence of the Prioress, who knowing the truth at last made answer, "Alas, the pity of it! Ah, the cruel, cruel pity of it." . . . And then:—"thinking you faithless, I took the holy vows which wedded me to Heaven. How can I leave my heavenly Bridegroom for love of any man upon this earth?"

There it had been best left. But, incredible as it appears, Symon, Bishop of Worcester, who was the spiritual guide of the Order, when the Abbess consulted him as to a nun whose vocation she doubted, made the amazing reply, "Methinks these nunneries would serve a better purpose were they schools from which to send women forth into the world to be good wives and mothers, rather than store-houses filled with sad

samples of Nature's great purposes deliberately unfiled."

Such being the views of the Bishop, it is not surprising that the Prioress did not have his support in her effort to remain faithful to her vows. But, knowing her, he told Sir Hugh: "She will not come to you unless she knows it to be right to come, and believes it to be wrong to stay. I stand aside and wait while she—of purer, clearer vision, and walking nearer Heaven than you or I—discerns the right, and, choosing it, rejects the wrong. Should she be satisfied that life with you is indeed God's will for her—and I tell you honestly, it will take a miracle to bring this about—she will come to you. But she will not come to you unless, in so doing, she is choosing what to her is the harder part."

The good Bishop, who is depicted as a saintly character who had, many years before, himself been in love with the Prioress, did his best, from his point of view, for he sent a messenger to Rome, and obtained "a dispensation, signed and sealed by the Pope, releasing Mora, Countess of Norelle, from all vows and promises taken and made when she entered the Nunnery of the White Ladies of Worcester.

But the Prioress tore up the Pope's dispensation. "I will not," she said, "go to the man I love trailing broken vows, like chains, behind me. There could be no harmony in life's music."

Fortunately, the Bishop had presented her with a copy only, for the original, after all, came in handy later on. But, not until Mora had once again been deceived (though not by the man who loved her), and had passed through many trials, did she at last realise her complete happiness, and, even so, the Convent Bell still sounded in her ears.

The story is to the last degree improbable; but it will interest the many though it shocks the few.

M. B.

## COMING EVENTS.

February 21st.—Central Midwives Board. Monthly Meeting, Queen Anne's Gate Buildings. 11 a.m.

February 21st.—Society for State Registration of Trained Nurses. Meeting of Executive Committee. 431, Oxford Street, London, W. 1. 4 p.m.

February 23rd.—National Union of Trained Nurses, London Branch; Annual Business Meeting. Address by Colonel Mayo Robson, C.V.O., C.B., F.R.C.S., Consulting Surgeon Southern Command, on "The After Care of the Disabled Soldier." Members free; non-members, admission 6d.; tea, 6d. 46, Marsham Street, Westminster, 3 p.m.

February 28th.—Royal British Nurses' Association: Lecture, Miss Lucy Bell, on "Tales of Old London." 11, Chandos Street, Cavendish Square, W. 2.45 p.m.

## WORD FOR THE WEEK.

"All persons," said Burke, "possessing any portion of power ought to be strongly and awfully impressed with an idea that they act in trust."

\* G. P. Putnam's Sons, 24, Bedford Street, Strand, W.C. 6s. net.

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