

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

THE STUCCO HOUSE.*

This very interesting psychological study is obviously a sequel to a book which has gone before, and this, of course, makes it rather difficult to understand, unless the book in question happens to be fresh in one's memory, for allusions and incidents are taken for granted with no attempt to make them intelligible.

Having made our grumble, we go on to say that the "Stucco House" is an extraordinarily interesting and able book, about the most perversely uncomfortable set of people that it has ever been our fortune to meet.

Catherine is one of the most exasperating of them all, though no doubt she had much justification for her crookedness.

Her great grievance was the dominating nature of her husband's family, and next to that was the temperament of her husband himself.

Jamie was not dominating at all, at least in the same sense as the rest of the family.

He was blessed, or cursed, with "temperament," which his family had conjointly agreed to suppress into commercialism, and the pursuit of a comfortable income in the family business.

At the moment of the opening of the story his family and Catherine are awaiting his return from America, whither he had been sent in accordance, this time, with his inclination, to write articles on that country for the *Post*.

During Jamie's absence his second child had been born.

Mary, "an incorrigible spinster," and one of the dominating Lawries, tells Catherine that she will make herself responsible for her education.

"Can none of you leave the children alone," said Catherine tartly. "You'd think they were orphans already."

Mary chuckled.

"We're a fussy lot. We have too keen a sense of the miraculous."

Catherine looked puzzled, and Mary explained—

"Life is one long miracle to us; money, success, failure, misery—all miracles. We don't get on with people to whom it is just a meal."

"A child's a child, I think," retorted Catherine; and Mary, in her turn, was a little bewildered by this solid common sense.

"Oh! we Lawries," she sighed, at last; and she imagined Jamie coming in then quietly and slowly as was his way, and moving over towards Catherine as she sat under the lamp with the child on her knee lying face downwards, giving little cries as she jogged it up and down and patted its back. This imagination was so actual that she could see Jamie standing over his wife hungrily devouring her with his eyes, imploring her to let him share the solid physical comfort she enjoyed.

* By Gilbert Canaan. (London: Fisher Unwin & Co.)

And when Jamie returned, it seemed, at the first home-coming, that he and Catherine were coming to a better understanding of each other.

"It's a good home coming," said Jamie. "You may roam the world over and find no such treasure anywhere." Catherine was proud and elated. Almost for the first time in her life she felt sure of him.

Often she had thought vengefully of the suffering he had inflicted on her in the past, always straining as he had been to be out and away, always disturbing the smooth surface of existence in his wild efforts to churn up from the depths things that were much better left buried beneath the leagues of the ocean of habit.

But a leopard does not so easily change its spots, and Catherine and Jamie are again soon hopelessly at variance.

The story is dated at the Gladstonian epoch, when party politics ran high.

Jamie was of opinion that—

"We're all doddering off to sleep; you can see our heads nodding on our shoulders. I believe the country nearly did wake up once, which so frightened the gentry that they have been drugging the people ever since. Parliament is an apothecary's shop where they sell votes, education, local government—anything and everything to keep the people asleep."

Jamie, of course, should never have married; or, if he had been ordained to do so, the last person he should have selected was Catherine.

He might in any case have wrecked his own life, for he was, as many a genius is, irresponsible; but, at least, his children would have escaped a very unhappy home. Would Catherine have been more human with another than Jamie for her husband? We wonder!

Grey-haired, reprobate, Jamie, at the end of his most uncomfortable chronicle, can still say, "The victory is mine, for I have gone through what they must all suffer. And it has ended as in this mad world all suffering must, in a joke, a charming joke."

By which sentiment the reader can vaguely surmise what an exasperating personality was that of Jamie Lawrie. H. H.

COMING EVENTS.

June 23rd.—Hospital Sunday. The Lord Mayor and the Sheriffs of the City of London will attend the morning service at Westminster Abbey and the afternoon service at St. Paul's Cathedral.

June 24th-28th.—General Lying-in Hospital, York Road, Lambeth, S.E. Post Graduate Week for Midwives. Reception by Matron and Staff, June 24th. 4 p.m.

June 29th.—League of St. Bartholomew's Hospital Nurses. General Meeting. Clinical Theatre, St. Bartholomew's Hospital, E.C. 2.30 p.m. Social Gathering, Nurses' Sitting-room. 4 p.m.

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