

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"MISSING."*

There is not very much in this book that we have not read many times over in novels since the war broke out.

The young bride, so soon a young widow, and the inevitable refuge of the bereaved—V.A.D. nursing.

We are rather surprised that so able a writer as Mrs. Humphry Ward should have been content to follow such a well-worn theme, and if the truth were told, to present such a poor little specimen of womanhood as Nellie Sarratt as her heroine. Is it really necessary to be a fool in order to be feminine? Bridget, her sister, to be sure, was an odious person, but it is not to be wondered at that such a colourless little person as Nellie should have had an irritating effect upon her.

At the close of the book we find that this helpless, clinging, foolish little creature—whose only apparent merit was that she was pretty and sweet, who had been quite unable to take care of herself, or arrange her own domestic affairs—contemplating the nursing of war nerve cases, after a period of six months' training. This is only one more evidence of the failure of the laity to grasp the seriousness of the science of nursing. Does Mrs. Humphry Ward really consider that the woman she has herself ruled out as a nonentity could in six months acquire the backbone of character, the trained skill, the psychological experience, the understanding sympathy, and the physical endurance which go to make up the successful nurse for these distressing conditions? Truly "fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

Listen to this.

"Nellie was in black again, with a small black hat from which her widow's veil fell back over her shoulders. The veil, the lawn collar and cuffs, with her childish slightness, and the curls on her temple and brow she had tried to straighten, made her look like a little girl masquerading.

"She spoke for the first time as one who was mistress of her life and its issues, and with a perfectly clear notion of what there was to do. She had made up her mind, she told Hester, to take work offered her in one of the new special hospitals for nervous cases which were the product of the war. 'They think I have a turn for it and they are going to train me. Isn't it dear and sweet of them?'"

It may have been very "dear and sweet" for our poor little friend Nellie, but there were also those unconsidered trifles, the patients, who were to be sacrificed in order that she might be healed.

To go back to the beginning again. George Sarratt, after a fortnight's honeymoon with his pretty, foolish little wife, returns to the front, and is shortly afterwards reported as missing. Nellie,

* By Mrs. Humphry Ward. W. Collins & Co., London.

in true early Victorian manner, mourns him helplessly, and her appealing softness attracts the admiration of her wealthy neighbour, Sir William Farrell, who was Commandant of his own Hospital. Quite evidently in Sir William's mind the wish was father to the thought that George would never be heard of again.

Bridget, her sister, who was weary of the yoke of poverty, viewed with satisfaction Sir William's growing affection for her sister, and allowed herself to dwell on their improved condition should Nellie be persuaded to forsake her allegiance to her missing husband.

After a year's silence Bridget receives a telegram from a hospital in France asking her to come over to see if a patient, long unconscious, was Nellie's missing husband. Unknown to her sister, Bridget journeys to France, and finds that it is indeed poor George Sarratt. She determines to deny his identity in order that Nellie may marry Sir William. Poor little Nellie, however, is informed from another source, and arrives to see the last of her husband.

In conclusion we would like to quote the picture drawn of Cicely Farrell, yet another V.A.D. nurse.

"Nellie was suddenly aware of the flaming up of fierce elemental things in this fashionably dressed young woman, whose time was oddly divided between an important share in the running of her brother's hospital and a hungry search after such gaieties as a world at war might provide her with. She could spend one night absorbed in some critical case and eagerly rendering the humblest V.A.D. services to the trained nurses her brother paid, and the next morning she would travel to London in order to spend the second night in one of those small dances at great houses of which she had spoken to Nellie."

Apparently Mrs. Humphry Ward does not recommend this system, and for this we must be grateful, but the fact that it is chronicled is only another proof of the way in which the nursing profession has been brought into disrepute in the war.

Nothing can be more deplorably ignorant and offensively snobbish than the attitude of "Society" towards scientific nursing as presented by Mrs. Humphry Ward.

H. H.

COMING EVENTS.

January 5th.—Irish Nurses' Association, Meeting Executive Committee, 34, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin. 8 p.m.

January 8th.—Annual Re-Union, Kensington Infirmary Nurses' League. Reception and Concert. 8 p.m.

January 10th.—Royal British Nurses' Association. Lecture: A Trip to America and American Hospitals, by Mr. Herbert J. Paterson, F.R.C.S. Chair: His Excellency the American Ambassador. 1, Wimpole Street, London, W. 2.45 p.m.

January 17th.—Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses. Meeting of Executive Committee, 431, Oxford Street, W. 4 p.m.

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