

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"THE NURSERY."*

Mr. Eden Phillpotts needs no recommendation, and no introduction. He is always worth reading. He most often deals with primitive and lawless men and women, but he would lose much of his power and charm if he attempted to lead his readers by conventional paths. "The Nursery" is an Essex story and the local colour is one of its chief attractions.

Aveline, the young widow, who turned out not to be a widow at all, appeared in the neighbourhood of Colchester to follow her profession of a painter. None knew from where she came, or aught of her, save that she was a beautiful woman. Her entry into the village life was marked by her rescuing a love-sick girl from suicide in the River Colne, and afterwards her consequent close friendship with the girl. The incident also provided an introduction to the village circle, for Margery came of decent people and was well known in the neighbourhood. Aveline's first coveted subjects for a picture were the tramps, who play a prominent part in the story.

"Both man and woman were somewhat extraordinary figures, and both smoked pipes. The woman bore the marks of beauty in ruins. She might have been forty-five, and was tanned brick-red by exposure. Her eyes were bright and of the darkest brown; on her head she wore a bedraggled hat, with one great turkey feather set bolt upright upon it; her hair was cut short, and her thin bosom was buttoned up in an old Norfolk jacket. Her dress of withered brown ended in a fringe of rags.

The man accosting Aveline Brown says:—

"Me and Emma was wondering what you were up to."

"I'm going to paint a picture."

"Why?" asked the man.

"I live by it."

"Can't say as I've see you before, have you, Emma?"

"I'm a newcomer to Colchester."

"We're very well known—famous, in fact," explained Emma.

"But our liking for fresh air and objection to what they calls 'honest toil' makes us a people apart," drawled the man. "I'm William Ambrose and she's Emma Davey, better known as 'Marmalade Emma,' owing to a misunderstanding at the grocer's."

The brother of the male tramp was Aubrey Parkyn Ambrose, described by Emma as the "biggest nursery man in Colchester. Worth hundreds of thousands, I daresay—and the Mayor of Colchester this year into the bargain."

"I'm the thorn in his flesh," declared the tramp. He certainly was! If Mr. Phillpotts can draw the disreputable tramp true to life, he is no less successful when he paints nature in more

attractive form, and his description of the summer glory in the nursery garden glows with colour.

It was while strolling in the gardens that Aveline met Peter Mistle, who was to play a great part in her life.

He was the designer of the water garden. Aveline asks if she may sketch there. "I'd love to try this lakelet, but I expect it would beat me," she confessed! "D'you know the underlying gold in it? But you made it, so no doubt you do. It's gold. You feel it more than you can see it, but it's there soaking everything. It actually flashes out on a dead water-lily leaf, or the edge of a reed, or in those warm, cloudy masses of plume poppy beyond."

Oyster-dredging at Brightlingsea is yet another aspect of industry from this versatile pen, and it is possible to learn a great deal on this subject from Mr. Rebow. Of the human interest, it is impossible to justify Aveline's treatment of Peter Mistle, for she married him well knowing that her husband was alive, but the war solved the problem of their relationship, as it has solved many other problems.

Even Marmalade Emma contrives to be pathetic, and she laments faithfully her disreputable partner, whose terrible death is depicted in characteristic fashion.

"Of course," she said, "we shan't tramp no more, nor nothing of that. But he believed we should meet again; he often said he'd be terrible bored till I came to him. He'll be changed, but I hope not too much changed." Her simple faith is not shared by Aveline, who, speaking of Peter's death with the tramp—in the familiar fashion that Mr. Phillpotts makes natural—says, "He must have known that if he ever really came back that it would be ages before he could trust me or respect me any more. And no doubt he felt the game wasn't worth the candle.

"If you could only feel, same as I do that you're going back to him—if he's happy, then it's your place to be content."

But Aveline had the one adventure that Peter Mistle had declared that everyone needed, although it spelt disaster for herself and the man she professed to love.

H.H.

LIFE.

I play with life on different days
In different moods,
Sometimes my wayward spirit strays
In wonderful solitudes.
Sometimes I seek the crowded ways
Of the world's gay multitudes.

Sometimes my soul is fierce and mad
As a winter sea;
Sometimes my soul is brave and glad,
And the hours are good to me,
But often enough it is tired and sad,
Poor waif of eternity!

—From *Rainbows*, by OLIVE CUSTANCE.

* By Eden Phillpotts. (London: Heinemann.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)