## BOOK OF THE WEEK.

### "AN ENGLISH FAMILY."*

This is a notable book and deserving of being read with close attention.

It gives a clever analysis of more than one remarkable personality, which personalities, as is indicated by the title, are for the most part united by family ties.

Though dealing with the present period and up-to-date topics, its literary style has a flavour of Early Victorian writers, which gives the whole book a certain unusual piquancy.

The family in question belonged to a clergyman of "evangelical views of a troublesome order," the sternness of which he expended in the pulpit, and he made use of his children "to refresh his spirit and restore his strength."

"Never were children so spoilt; no children had ever more reason to adore their father."

The book is written in the first person by the youngest son, Hugh, who gives dispassionate evidence of the undisciplined brood which was the result of their indulgent upbringing. Hugh speaks of his father in middle life as having modified the sternness of his religious belief. This he attributes to his children's "little warm hands stealing into his own, which had pulled him away from his fiery station over the fiery pit.

"He might have been a dean, or at any rate an archdeacon, for he had powerful relations and was a man of the most agreeable manner, but for a malady which attacked him in middle life. This malady I call the malady of the armchair.

"God knows what was happening to the souls of his congregation while this lovable man, who, mark you, was the most upright, gentle and kindliest of human spirits, smoked his pipe and nodded his head over the rhetoric of Macaulay or the German philosophy of George Eliot."

Young Hugh himself was frankly a waster; at any rate, till he was well on in life. He draws a quite unbiassed portrait of himself.

He was early made independent by old Newdigate, who singled him out from his brothers for his favour and had him educated at Repton.

It was here that he formed a friendship with Lionel Torrance, "the finest fellow in the school and the finest man I have ever known. For some reason or another, this lion, who was in the same house as I was, took a fancy to me, and in spite of all the disparities between us we were friends."

The curious aspect of this hero-worship on the part of Hugh was that it did not stimulate him to justify his own existence—for Lionel Torrance was certainly worthy of Hugh's expressed enthusiasm.

In the meanwhile, Hugh's father had inherited Longworthy, his ancestral home, and it was to this beautiful old estate and house that Hugh was proud to ask his friend for his holidays.

"That night when I went with Torrance to his room, he said to me, 'I love your father and of course I am going to marry your sister Rose; you quite understand that, don't you?'

"Although he laughed as he said this, I felt certain he meant it, and for the first time in my life I thought of Rose as a Person. She was then fifteen with her hair down her back."

Hugh says of Lionel:

"The main thing about him which attracted everybody was his perfectly inexhaustible joy and delight in himself. I don't mean that he was an egoist. I mean that he loved in some inexplicably detached fashion his exuberant health, his quick way of seeing to the truth of things, his great physical accuracy and his capacity to enjoy."

A year or two later, when he had married Rose and become a great surgeon, he endeavours to impart to Hugh some of the inspiration of his high calling.

"When I go into an operation I have no thought in my mind but the patient. The whole of my attention is concentrated on saving a life. I do not glance at the anæsthetist or the dresser, or the sisters or the nurses. I don't wonder what they are doing. I don't worry about them. I *know* what they are doing—know they are doing everything perfectly. They are mine. They are trained in my way. We are a team and we do team work. Shall I tell you something private? The atmosphere in my theatre during an operation is like that of a church. We never speak a word—none of us. The work is done in silence—complete, unbroken silence. Do you know why I make this rule? The patient may be fast asleep; he may be perfectly anæsthetised; but handle a vital organ roughly and you see it shrink from you, just as a child shrinks from a blow. Isn't that interesting? So you see, dear old gin-and-water, we men who cherish ideals and who love perfection, work in absolute silence, with the extremity of tenderness and with all our thoughts solemnly directed, *solemnly* to saving life. We are thinking of the whole patient, his consciousness, his unconsciousness, his soul. We are very, very tender; we are also reverent; perhaps some of us are praying." When success attends his effort he says:—"That's triumph. That's the wages God gives us. Now do you understand why all the money in the world can't buy my second best"? We make no excuse for quoting this passage at length, for it contains ideals on which nurses as well as surgeons would do well to ponder, and which will, perchance, benefit them more than quoting from passages which tell of Hugh's faithful love for Ann, or the erratic doings of his various brothers. But it is all worth reading, and we should certainly advise all who have the opportunity to obtain the book and read it. We can promise them both pleasure and profit.

* By Harold Begbie. London: Hutchinson & Son.

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