

## BOOK OF THE WEEK.

## THE CHEATS.\*

Miss Bowen's genius is inexhaustible. Here we have yet another historical novel from her pen of the same high-water-mark of excellence, touched with the same vivid imagination, radiating local colour, and stamped with striking personalities.

Her central figure in "The Cheats" is the unacknowledged eldest son of Charles II—Jacques de Rohan.

Until the period at which the story opens he had been living in obscurity in Jersey, believing himself to be the nephew of a simple village clergyman, with whom he lived. But the old man to whom the history of Jacques was of course known, and who, it was asserted by some, had actually married the Royal youth in his early teens to Jacques' mother, had now received the King's commands to bring Jacques de Rohan to Whitehall.

Jacques was of notable appearance owing to his height and strength, and his remarkable face, which, coarse in line, in texture and colouring was yet pleasant. He had received few advantages in his Jersey home, and his introduction to Society filled him with bitterness at his shortcomings and his penniless condition, which he realised for the first time.

Added to this he at once fell in love with Eleanor, the daughter of Sir Miles Coningsby, as up to this point he was totally unaware of his relationship to the King.

Eleanor's treatment of him was the first step in his unhappy career. His obstinate nature clung to his love for her, though, truth to tell, there was little in her that merited a grand passion. But the young man was unsophisticated, and it was his first experience of a woman in her position. It was while smarting from her rebuff that he learned from the Jesuit, "Your mother was Mary Stewart of the Earls of Mar, a Lennox of Royal blood—the King married her."

The Jesuit makes clear to Jacques his present position and the King's ultimate wishes for him.

"By right you are the Prince of Wales."

"And in reality? A poor, penniless adventurer, nameless, a mirth, a jest—no, I do not thank you for your tale."

"The King will look after you."

"Five hundred a year in his secret service!"

"The King may acknowledge you."

"He would never dare to—why should he?"

Jacques informed the Jesuit—

"I am what the King has made of me. It is too late to make a prince of me, Father. I am what I was trained to be, a Jersey farmer. Tell me now—and have done with it."

"I am ready to do so. The King requires you to become a priest of the Roman Church."

To Jacques the limit of fantasy seemed reached, and he broke into an angry laugh. Further, he informed him that in due course, he was to be appointed Private Confessor to the King.

Inexperienced Jacques was as a puppet in the hands of the Jesuits, and every detail of his life henceforth was arranged for, or circumvented by them, as the case might be.

It was arranged that the fascinating Duke of Buckingham should alienate the affections of Eleanor Coningsby, so that when the unhappy Jacques, with his prospects of five hundred a year went again to press his suit, she met him with contemptuous disdain.

Jacques could see how it was done; how easily it had been done. The Duke had not even made love to her; he had only conveyed what his wooing could be. He had insinuated, suggested an ideal of a lover that had completely dazzled Eleanor. He was not young, he had lost his always coarse good looks, yet he had been able to lead this girl's fancy exactly where he wished.

"Jacques was sick of it all; tired and disgusted on this perfect day of early spring." Caught in the toils, it was useless to struggle to escape from his fate, or from the powerful influence of the Pope, and all who are acquainted with the history of those times will remember the secret submission of the King to the Roman Church, and his perilous position, in consequence.

Jacques' interview while in Italy, and training as a Jesuit with the ex-Queen of Sweden, Cristina, is an interesting episode.

"She was perhaps the most illustrious convert ever made by the Church of Rome, the woman who had given up her throne for the faith." She is described as having cold features, and hawk nose, which were framed in a brown wig of thick curls, like a masculine peruke; and the rest of her costume, cravat, waistcoat, coat, were shaped like a man's attire. After hearing his story she said:

"Of course there was a marriage, and of course you cannot prove it. It will spoil your life," she added.

"There was very little to spoil," returned Jacques grimly.

"You are a fine young man," returned the Queen coolly. "You ought not to speak so cynically."

"I have been cheated. Everyone whom I have met has been a cheat."

"And you, yourself, are you not also a cheat, James Stewart?"

The young man flushed.

"You are a priest with no priestly thought in your mind. You have taken orders from merely ambitious motives."

"No," he disclaimed, his motives were revenge.

"On whom?"

"On the cheats."

"On your father?"

"Yes."

We have no space but to give the bare outline of this story, but we think it is enough to show the great possibilities of the romance of which it is needless to say, full advantage has been taken. The study of the Stuart period is bound to be fascinating, and its religious intrigues, its

\* By Marjorie Bowen. (Collins & Sons, Ltd.)

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