

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

DANGEROUS AGES.*

With "Potterism" still fresh in our minds, we turn to Miss Macaulay's new book with pleasurable anticipation, and we are not disappointed.

It is a clever commentary on the idiosyncrasies incidental to persons of four succeeding generations.

It is dedicated "To my Mother, driving gaily through the adventurous middle years."

The chronicle begins on Neville's 43rd birthday. Not at all the dull anniversary that her age would seem to suggest.

The description of her doings on that particular morning better suggest a girl of fourteen.

All the same, she suffered a restless birthday bitterness in the night, and woke up with the thought, "Another year gone, and nothing done yet."

She arose in the early morning, swam once round the bathing pool, re-clad herself in pyjamas, and swarmed neatly up the smooth trunk of a beech tree, and sat on a broad branch astride.

Nor does this picture suggest the mother of an amazingly up-to-date young son and daughter in their early twenties—but so it was.

Though she loved them well, Neville sat in the beech tree and envied their chances and their contacts with life, envied her husband Rodney, regretted the medical career which her marriage had aborted. Her discontent was dissipated by Gerda and Kay, her son and daughter, who sought her out and called her a sneak for not having wakened them to bathe with her.

"Their childhood had been lived during the great war, and they had emerged from it hot with elemental things, discussing life, lust, love, politics and social reform with cool candour, intelligent thoroughness, and Elizabethan directness."

They were inclined to marriages in the sight of heaven as being more readily dissoluble when fatiguing.

"I do very much hope," said Neville, "that neither of you will perpetrate that sort of marriage. It would be so dreadfully common of you."

"Impossible to say," said Kay, vaguely.

Nan, Neville's unmarried sister, represented the thirties; she wrote, lived in rooms in Chelsea, was rather like a wild animal—a leopard, or something.

Nan had a good time socially and intellectually. She was clever and lazy. Her worst fault was a cynical unkindness, against which she did not strive, because investigating the less admirable traits of human beings amused her. She was infinitely amused by her nephew and niece, but was often spiteful to them merely because they were young. To sum up she was a cynic, a rake, an excellent literary critic, and brilliant novelist.

One reason of her spiteful attitude to Gerda and Kay was because she wrote and thought they wrote poetry. Why shouldn't they do anything else in the world but trespass on her preserves?

*By Rose Macaulay. Collins, London.

"Have you read my poems yet?" inquired Gerda, who never showed the customary abashed hesitation in dealing with these matters.

"Read them—yes," Nan returned, laconically. "What," inquired Gerda, perseveringly, "did you think of them?"

"I said I'd read them," Nan replied. "I didn't say I'd thought of them."

Mrs. Hilary, Neville and Nan's mother, is a most tiresome person of sixty-three. She was a mother with marked preferences. There were various barriers between her and her various children. She found life tedious, empty and dead.

Neville, her favourite child, found herself constantly asking *must* it be empty and dead? Should she herself feel like that in twenty years?

Mrs. Hilary lived with her mother—dear old Grandmamma of eighty-three—by far the nicest person in the book.

Mrs. Hilary was as envious in her way of the younger generation as Neville, as was instanced by the swimming party on Mrs. Hilary's sixty-third birthday, in which she refused to be outdone by her juniors.

Her daughter-in-law, whom she detested, and who detested her, invited her in a malicious way to sit in the surf with her.

"I prefer swimming," said Mrs. Hilary, and she was shivering now. She usually only plunged in and came out.

Grandmamma, on the esplanade in her donkey chair, called out in her thin, old voice:

"Come out, dear. You've been in far too long." But Mrs. Hilary only waved her hand to Grandmamma. She was not going to come out like an old woman before the others did, who had swum out and left her alone on her birthday bathe.

Her experiments in psycho-analysis are very amusing.

Gerda's love affair is characteristic of that cool young lady. She considers the marriage ceremony obsolete and absurd, but Barry, a perfectly normal man, refuses to take her on any but the usual terms. Kay persuades her to give in, as, after all, it was not of any importance.

The records of these varying aspects of life finish with a picture of dear old Grandmamma playing piquet with the little maid, who would rather have been in the kitchen writing to her young man, but who liked to oblige the nice old lady, of whom the kitchen was very fond.

"It was all very well for Grandmamma," Mrs. Hilary, who no longer found comfort in psycho-analysis, thought stormily, "All very well for Grandmamma, contented with books, games and sleep; unbitten by the murderous hatred of time that consumed herself. Time so long to Mrs. Hilary was short now to Grandmamma, and would soon be gone."

"Why did life play these tricks?" Mrs. Hilary cried within herself.

What had she done to life, that it should have left her empty-handed, pitiful, alone with time, the enemy, and with Grandmamma, for whom it was all very well?

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