

## BOOK OF THE WEEK.

## THE MASTER OF MAN.\*

The Isle of Man is once more selected as a theatre for a tragedy by Mr. Hall Caine.

Once more his characters are made to play the parts of passion and its devastating consequences.

In this story not only the woman pays but the man also—her partner in sin—to the full.

It began, this fateful acquaintance, when the lad Stowell was at school. At the close of that period his friend Alick Gell came near to being discovered as the boy who had been seen with little Bessie Collister after hours.

Stowell, however, was suspected and accused, but Alick was his friend and he maintained silence under the accusation. Victor was the son of Deemster Stowell, who bore an unstained name for honour and uprightness as a judge. Victor Stowell, although his name was cleared, in consequence of this incident ended his school career abruptly. It is somewhat difficult to understand why he should have been sent home, in these circumstances, under a cloud.

Little Bessie, also, was sent home from her place to her mother and brutal stepfather, though at that stage no harm had been done. Dan's brutality to the girl was the indirect cause of her ultimate downfall.

She met Victor, subsequently, when he was a student of law at the Manx Bar. He and his friend Alick had been bathing, and the girl came along driving her cows.

"She was a strapping girl of four or five and twenty, full-blooded and full-bosomed, with coal-black hair and gleaming black eyes under her sun bonnet, which was turned back from her forehead, showing a comely face of a fresh complexion, with eager mouth and fresh red lips. She came swinging down the glen with a jaunty step, her hips moved, with her whole body, to a rhythm of health and happiness."

Now Victor Stowell was a fine young fellow, clean of mind, with high ideals; but an unkind fate threw him into the arms of Bessie, with the usual result.

And he hadn't meant any harm; indeed, he struggled against the temptation.

He met her again at a dancing hall in Douglas, where he and his friend Alick had gone in search of light-hearted adventure.

Bessie had been threatened by her stepfather that if she were not in by ten she would not come in at all that night. The excitement of the dance caused her, like Cinderella, to outstay her time. Victor found her, later, wandering crying about the streets, and at first, from motives purely of compassion, took her to his rooms.

Repentance came when too late; but his really chivalrous nature led him to make provision for Bessie, and in due course he intended to make her his wife. This in spite of his romantic love for Fenella, the beautiful daughter of the Speaker.

The real drama of the book lies in the tragedy of Bessie killing, albeit unintentionally, her illegitimate child, and being tried by Victor Stowell, who had by this time succeeded his father as Deemster.

Of course, no one suspected his relationship to the girl, and the paternity was popularly attributed to his friend Alick Gell, whose boyish attraction towards Bessie had ripened into love.

To understand the story it must be understood that Victor himself was for a long period unaware of the coming of a child as a result of his sin. His dilemma was a terrible one. On the one hand was his responsibility to Bessie (who had finally preferred Alick and had refused to marry him), and on the other hand was the solemn oath he had taken as Deemster to administer impartial justice.

He laboured unremittingly to get the death sentence commuted, and failing this he contrived (by virtue of his position) Bessie's escape across the seas with Alick.

Conscience played its part with him, and he then delivered himself up to justice, and received a sentence of two years' imprisonment in the prison from which he had effected Bessie's escape.

Through all the tragical happenings he had retained his passionate attachment to Fenella, who on her part shows herself the noble woman that she is.

She obtains a post in the jail in order to be near her lover, and finally prevails on the Bishop to marry them in the prison.

"It was all over. The parson, the jailer and his wife were gone. Stowell and Fenella were alone together in the prison chapel, locked in a passionate embrace.

"The kitchen candles were burning out, but the little dark place shone with glory.

"Two years! It would be like two months, two weeks, two days—it would be like a walk in the sunshine.

"She well knew that the victory had been won, that the resurrection of his soul had already begun, that he would rise again on the same soil on which he had so sadly fallen; that shining like a star before his brightening eyes was a vision of a far greater and nobler life than that which lay in ruins behind him, and that she, she herself, would always be by his side to 'ring the morning bell for him.'"

This is a deeply interesting book, and in addition to its thrilling tragedy it is most interesting in its account of Manx customs and its many powerful delineations of character.

H. H.

## A WORD FOR THE WEEK.

"If one brave, broken soul you leave befriended,  
The world will know your own soul's life is dead.  
Then shall your hope of dominance be ended;  
Worthless the body whence the soul is fled.

Hereby the world shall test your right to headship;  
Hereby shall know if you are sound at heart;  
Or if your soul is sunken in the dead sleep

Of those who value not 'the better part.'"

—John Oxenham.

\* Hall Caine. Heinemann.

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