

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

THE GLASS OF FASHION.*

To students of contemporary history "The Glass of Fashion" (Some Social Reflections by "A Gentleman with a Duster") will give food for thought, and room for hope, for the author, who is an unsparing critic of certain persons in high places, and emphasises the danger of their pernicious example, realises also that "empty vessels make most noise," that "it is by realising his kinship with the universe that man becomes the creative agent of joy. This, perhaps, is our way to a greater renaissance than that which illuminated the sixteenth century, and went astray in the seventeenth."

What are we to understand by "Fashion" of which this book is "the glass"? The author tells us in his introduction:—

"By the term Fashion I mean all those noisy, ostentatious, and frivolous people, patricians, plutocrats, politicians and financiers, lawyers and tradesmen, actors and artists, who have scrambled on to the summit of England's national life, and who, setting the worst possible examples in morals and manners, are never so happy as when they are making people talk about them. It is of these ostentatious people I write, and my chief hope is to make the Gentry of England talk about them in such a manner as will either bring them to a sense of their duties or lead to their expulsion from the heights."

Dealing first with the "Principles of the Commonwealth" and the endurance exhibited by Englishmen in the Great War, the author writes: "For the sake of England, let us never cease to remind ourselves, men endured greater horrors than ever before in the history of mankind visited and afflicted the human soul . . . With a higher sensibility than was known to ancient warriors, with a far more delicate nervous organism, and with the greater tenderness of heart which we hope is one of the fruits of British civilisation, young Englishmen were called upon to take part in such a mangling of butchery, such an indiscriminate anarchy of slaughter and mutilation, such a filthiness of Bedlamite carnage, as no man had witnessed from the beginning of time."

"What was it that held them to their posts? Men who never reasoned before are turning their minds to consider the cause for which their continued endurance is demanded." And the ultimate answer is: "The Englishman sees with clearness that neither the doctrine of Prussianism nor the doctrine of Bolshevism squares with his inherent notions of the purposes of existence. He has freedom in his blood . . . He prefers to march onward as a free man than to find himself trapped by a tyranny."

"England, still far short of her ideal, stands in a world of many diverse doctrines, and a world at

many different levels of civilisation, for Liberty and Character . . . It is vital to the higher life of the human race that she should continue to stand for this great thing, since tyranny never sleeps, and the victory for Freedom will not be won till all nations have acquired the moral character which renders liberty a power and not a danger.

"The question we now have to ask ourselves is whether those people in England who set the nation its standards in morals and manners are helping us to stand for this great thing, are strengthening our moral fibres, quickening our spiritual ideals, or whether they are leading the nation into an ambush while tyranny waits to strike another blow at his chief enemy."

The author then proceeds to test Fashionable Society by its own documents, and the documents which he uses are the "recent published work of fashionable people," which "give us valuable information concerning a great number of other fashionable people. They have been published without shame, have achieved a considerable popularity, and are acknowledged by the best judges to be thoroughly indiscreet—that is to say, truthful but unwise." He then discusses at some length Colonel Repington's Diaries, and Mrs. Asquith's Autobiography. He reminds us of the Diaries that they were written and filled with their trivial details when "an iron hand was closing over the soul of freedom. A grasp of slavery like that which now holds Russia in its ruthless clutches was tightening round the writhing body of this world's liberty. And during those months of almost unendurable suspense the flower of England's youth was bleeding to death in the most frightful shambles that even a maniac could imagine." It is "then at that moment, in those very days, when Colonel Repington was filling his diaries . . . No one reading this book would understand that England was fighting for the greatest political ideal which has ever risen from the furnace of slavery, and that her sons were offering their lives in no less a cause than the higher life of the human race."

Quotations are given by which one is "not only shocked, but filled with a dull nausea . . . The manner is flippant, but the spirit is unmistakable. It is the fatal spirit of self-satisfaction. Beneath all their frivolity and trivial persiflage, these people are profoundly convinced of superiority, profoundly unaware of unworthiness."

From the document of a man of the world the author turns to the document of a woman of the world, "The Autobiography of Margot Asquith."

Of the subject of this autobiography the author writes: "Mrs. Asquith belongs to that insurgent class of the commercial rich which broke into Society soon after the second Reform Bill and during the years of King Edward's reign completely overwhelmed it . . . Nature would have appeared to have fashioned her with a thirst for self-expression so burning, so grieved with the sand of the spiritual Sahara that she could not brook

* Mills & Boon, Ltd., 49, Rupert Street, London, W.1. 5s. net.

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