

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

SEARCH.*

A tragic story enough! Briefly, it tells of a man married to a beautiful girl, though *girl* does not fully convey to the mind the austere, virginal, aloof personality that called herself the wife of Jim Stonehouse. Alice, the "instinctive spinster," regarded the male sex, including her husband, with a faint disgust; and the man, ten years her senior, who worshipped her physical beauty, might have perhaps found contentment by her side had she not consistently repelled him by her serene coldness. Jim Stonehouse had not brought to his wife his first love. There had been a tragic affair with the young, unhappy wife of his neighbour, Harry Clowes, five years before—the horror of her removal to a mental hospital and her subsequent death there.

The incident had left Jim sore and bruised, and Alice was not the woman to bring him healing even after those long years had elapsed. The memory of Betty Clowes was always an unhealed place in his mind.

He tried to unburden his conscience to Alice in the early days of their engagement.

"You're not a baby, Alice; you must learn to face facts. . . . I have loved someone before you. I have been what you would call bad. You must understand this and forgive me before I can let you marry me."

She tells him with distaste that she does not wish to know all the horrible things he had done, and turned the conversation to carpets and curtains and suchlike things, hoping their colours would not clash.

Looking at the long oval of her face, her bright lashed eyes, the restored animation of her whole aspect, Jim, with rather a weighted heart, replied, "I hope nothing will clash; I leave it in your hands." The allegory of his remark was too obscure for her.

It was Sophy, Alice's little sister, that healed the old ache in Jim's heart, but, alas! only by creating another more cruel and enduring. "He did not pause to analyse the enjoyment he himself drew from that young companionship. He supposed vaguely that, sisterless, she filled an unrecognised void, with a completeness extraordinarily satisfying, in spite of the disparity of age.

She was at that period ten years old. He loved to watch her small face controlling the transports of her receptive soul.

He recognised in his own soul a flame of desire for the transplanting of Sophy's nature to the body of her sister. Alice's dear face and Sophy's heart. . . . What a woman might be made of such a blend. At seventeen Sophy left school and came home to live with her father, Mr. Channing, close at hand.

Her old childish adoration for her brother-in-law

* By Margaret Rivers Jarminie. Chatto & Windus.

had not diminished during her school years in Germany.

"Those golden brown eyes of hers (when he met her by the train) had at once their old special smile for him as he drew near, and his uneasiness occasioned by the fear that she might be somewhat a stranger to him, faded in the dear familiarity of her regained fondness, which was like an aura stretching out before him.

There was nothing gross in the unfolding of Jim's love for the girl, which he did his best to keep in its proper relationship, but his heart, starved by his wife, responded hungrily to the innocent devotion of his young sister-in-law. It was not until later that Sophy learned whither they were both drifting.

The closing chapters of this book are written with force and power, and with strong appeal to the emotions.

Sophy had decided to make Tod happy by becoming his wife before he went to the Front, and on the day of their marriage Alice died in giving birth to her second child.

We presume that the culminating point of this tragedy is intended to be that Alice's death came just too late to remove the barrier between Jim and Sophy, but in our opinion the barrier was an insurmountable one. We greatly admire Jim for his self-restraint and loyalty to his wife, and though we feel intense sympathy for both him and Sophy, we are glad that the *dénouement* is as it is, leaving us to respect them both.

On the day of Alice's funeral, sitting alone, he thought of his little daughter sleeping untroubled upstairs, and his heart grew dimly warm at the prospect of undivided ownership of that young thing.

In his lonely soliloquy he says "that greatly to desire anything and find that it exists is better than all the possessing. . . . All my life I've wanted what in your heart you've given me. I have you safe and can't ever lose you," meaning, of course, Sophy.

There are other interesting personalities in the story. Jim's homely old father and mother and fussy, irritable Mr. Channing are studies in contrast. The literary style of this author is of a high order.

H. H.

COMING EVENTS.

March 25th.—Royal British Nurses' Association's Club, 194, Queen's Gate, S.W. Informal Talk. "Things a Nurse Should Know," by Mr. Herbert Paterson, C.B.E., F.R.C.S. 8.15 p.m.

March 31st.—Professional Union of Trained Nurses. Annual General Meeting, "Plane Tree," 106, Great Russell Street, W.C.1. Admission by 1922 Membership card. 5.30 p.m.

April 4th to 7th.—Nursing and Midwifery Exhibition and Conference. 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Royal Horticultural Hall, S.W.1

April 22nd.—The Lady Mayoress (Lady Baddeley) "At Home," to meet the Past and Present Nurses of St. Bartholomew's Hospital. The Mansion House, London. Music 4 to 6 p.m.

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