

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

KATE CURLEW.*

This "romance of the Pentland Country" opens with a scene in the Manse of Flotterstane, in the early part of the nineteenth century.

Inside the house there were people at prayer, and a girl was listening. She knew there was a horseman abroad in the March gloaming. The clatter of his riding reached her between two gusts of the storm. Carefully she twisted herself out of her uneasy position. Her ankles ached with long crouching on the floor. Kneeling upright, she thrust her folded hand against the hard seat of the chair. Her father's supplication whined on. She opened her eyes and listened to the rider, not the prayer.

The girl cast herself down again, shuddering at the violence of the storm. "Oh, I have been wicked, wicked. I have been listening. God forgive my wandering thoughts and gather them in upon Thyself," prayed Isabella Veitch, in her father's phrase. Her hands were damp with sweat, and there was terror in her mind of what she might see in the corners of the room if she looked round.

She believed as surely as the praying man and the servant girl whimpering on her knees, and the rest of the company, that Satan himself was dancing on the slates and shouting in the storm. But Isabella was afraid of something which had no name, something which dwelt in her own mind through nights and days, in an odd shadow cast on the wall or in the creaking furniture when she was alone.

It is the story of this highly strung, nervous girl and her bonny sister Kate that this book sets out to tell. It was the Laird of Turnhouslee who rode through the storm on that wild night. He heard a tile rattle from the roof just as he pushed open the Manse gate, and he peered in at the uncurtained window with curiosity and disgust.

"At it again—exorcising the devil," he thought. "Ay, and yon snivelling fellow from Glencorse at it, too . . . and wee Isa. Oh, it's outrageous. She's shaking from head to foot. Yes, I'll do it this night."

She was a slight thing, and the straight lines of her faded muslin, cut in the style of some ten years back, without a flounce to grace it, made her seem smaller. Hope Wedderburn marked her uncertainty, and her nervous fingers, and the broken places in her little strapped shoes.

In spite of the minister's opposition to his demand for his daughter, he found an opportunity to be alone with the girl.

"Isa, will you marry me, dearie?" he asked. "I'm very fond of you. I've always been fond of you. I would like it fine if you would be my wife."

It was but chivalrous pity that moved him, but the girl was too unsophisticated to suspect the truth.

Hope Wedderburn was the one kind, sure thing in her universe at that moment, the only familiar thing that was not associated with fear. He was literally to her a thing.

Her nervous fears that evening were added to by the return of an almost stranger sister who had lived abroad and in Edinburgh, and whose ways and outlook would so differ from her own.

But Kate proved as charming as she was bonnie, and took the frightened Isa at once to her heart and championed her cause, although it was a strange, disheartening life for the girl to return to after a life full of colour and movement.

"Isa," she said, "you're always safe with me, mind that! As for Hope, we'll have a braw wedding of it yet. Oh, trust Kate for that. Papa loves you, too, in his way, and we'll get round him and all be very happy."

Kate made her plans. She would be the demure, the capable elder. Isabella, who had not a rag to wear, should have her new white muslins.

It was inevitable that such a timid, nervous creature as Isa should be unable to hold a man like Hope Wedderburn, with bonny sparkling Kate always in the foreground, and it was not long before a mutual avowal of love was wrung from them.

Isa was forgotten in those first few moments.

"Oh, how happy I am," she said. "I think I never was happy before this."

"My dear," he said, "has it been as bad as all that?"

A great deal of water flows under the bridge before Hope and Kate can honourably come together.

Isa's tragic end, and Kate's devotion to her, are well told.

The chapter in which Sir Walter Scott figures at a tea-party and discusses his own works with Hope Wedderburn should interest our readers.

Isa's character is an interesting psychological study, and its intricacies are well worked out. It was well that merciful death called her early.

H. H.

COMING EVENTS.

June 28th.—Combined Hospital Appeal. Princess Mary's Ball, Albert Hall, S.W.

June 29th.—Garden Fete, Guy's Hospital; arranged by the G.H. Ladies' Association. 3 to 9 p.m.

June 30th.—Royal British Nurses' Association. Annual Meeting. Her Royal Highness, Princess Christian, the President, will preside. 194, Queen's Gate, S.W. 5.30 p.m.

July 8th.—General Meeting League of St. Bartholomew's Hospital Nurses, Clinical Theatre. Social Gathering, Great Hall, St. Bartholomew's Hospital, E.C. 3 p.m.

July 12th.—The Lady Mayoress "At Home" to the Territorial Army Nursing Service, City and County of London, Mansion House, E.C. 9 to 11 p.m. Decorations.

* By Christine Orr. (Hodder & Stoughton.)

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