

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"DECEMBER LOVE."*

As its title indicates, this new novel by Mr. Robert Hichens is devoted to the subject of a woman of high social position who, unfortunately for her, was temperamentally unable, as far as her emotions were concerned, to adapt or control them in accord with her advancing years. She had been a famous beauty in her day, exercising considerable fascination over men, which fascination had been by no means spontaneous or opposed to her inclination, but rather deliberate and provocative.

At the time the story begins, Lady Sellingworth, a woman of sixty, twice widowed, had for the past ten years lived in comparative retirement in Berkeley Square, had renounced beauty doctors and other aids to juvenility, and was a dignified elderly lady who still retained much of her charm.

Ten years before she had suffered her last love affair, both discreditable and ludicrous for a woman of her years and position. She had been blinded by her insatiable vanity, badly let down, and had thrown up the sponge. Her intimates, worthless in the sense of their being entirely useless and without soul, were mystified at her change of habit, but although it was maliciously rumoured that it was due to another love affair of "Old Adela," nothing definite had ever transpired.

The tragedy of Adela Sellingworth's life was that she could not appreciate devotion of the men of her own generation, or she would have rewarded Sir Seymour Portman's undeviating and faithful love; but her desires were directed to men many years her junior, who, although they paid her court for her undoubted attractions, naturally were unaware of the nature of her regard for them, or, if they became so, used it for their own ends. The secret of "Old Adela's" retirement lay in the fact, to put it briefly, that she had ten years before followed a young and handsome adventurer to Paris, where he had relieved her of jewels to the extent of £50,000. The shock of this brought her to her senses for the time being, and at the time of the opening of the story the reader finds her making a brave fight against her youthful temperament which, at times, she is aware still persists.

She is thus described by the beautiful and absolutely unconventional (to use a mild term) American girl, Miss Van Tuyn:—

"You have marvellous old women in London who do all that we young people do and who look astonishing. Made of cast-iron, they seem. They even manage to be fairly attractive to young men. They are living marvels and I take off my toque to them.

"But Lady Sellingworth, quite old, ravaged, devastated by time one might say, who goes nowhere and who doesn't even play bridge—she beats them

all—I love her. I love her wrinkled distinction, her husky voice, her careless walk. She walks anyhow like a woman alone on a country road. She doesn't try to charm, that's partly why she succeeds, being as God made her. Do you know some people hate her, the young-old women of her time. She is their contemporary and she has the impertinence to be old. They can't forgive her for it."

From the above remarks it will be seen that Lady Sellingworth had done penance for her follies very thoroughly. At the moment Beryl van Tuyn was devoted to her, but that was before that amazing person had begun to attract Alick Craven. To do Lady Sellingworth justice, Alick's subsequent devotion to her started without any conscious effort on her part, but the chivalrous attentions of this good-looking young man in the Foreign Office demonstrated that the old Adam was only sleeping in Adela, and it was not long before he roused up once more.

Lady Sellingworth, however, pulled herself together in time, and she made good, by frankly owning up to past follies and thus saving Beryl from a disastrous marriage with the adventurer Arabian, whom she recognised as the man whom her incredible vanity had caused her in bygone years to follow to Paris and who had been accountable for the stolen jewels.

In the end Adela decides to reward Sir Seymour's long and patient devotion, and as he loved her with his eyes wide open upon her faults and frailties we may presume they had some years of happiness before them.

Mr. Hichens is more attractive in the desert than he is in the gay world of London, and with the exception of Craven and Sir Seymour, he writes of ignoble and frivolous people who seem hardly worth the pains he has bestowed upon them in this long closely-written novel.

Nevertheless Lady Sellingworth makes an interesting study, and one wonders if in reality hers is a unique tragedy. At any rate we hope that it is unusual.

H. H.

COMING EVENTS.

December 7th.—Royal British Nurses' Association Sale of Work for the Settlement Fund. Opened by Her Royal Highness Princess Christian, 12 noon, 194, Queen's Gate, S.W.

December 7th.—Glasgow Royal Infirmary. Nurses' League Reunion Dinner. Trades House, Glasgow. 7.45 p.m. Mrs. Strong, formerly Matron of the Royal Infirmary, will preside. Guest of Honour, Mrs. Bedford Fenwick.

December 8th.—Scottish Nurses' Club. Lecture on "Diseases of the Skin," by Dr. J. Ferguson Smith, M.A., M.B., Ch.B. 203, Bath Street, Glasgow. 7.30 p.m.

December 15th.—General Nursing Council for England and Wales: Monthly Meeting, Ministry of Health, Whitehall, S.W. 1. 2.30 p.m.

* By Robert Hichens. (Cassell & Co.).

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)