

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

THE WOMAN IN THE LITTLE HOUSE.*

In "The Woman in the Little House" Mrs. Eyles has given us a study of the conditions of life in the little houses of the suburbs—a sordid, miserable life. The aspects presented are Housing, Difficulties of Shopping, Food, Lack of Amusement and Spiritual Nourishment, Motherhood, &c. It amounts to an appeal for State recognition of Motherhood, and shows that much of the labour trouble of to-day is due to the unhappy homes of the men; this unhappiness, it is pointed out, is "caused by the overworked neurotic women."

The book is dedicated "with the author's thanks and affection to Isabel Thorne, who is doing so much to bring romance into the little grey houses and who dragged one woman out of her little house by teaching her to write stories."

Miss Norah March, B.Sc., contributes the Foreword, in the course of which she writes:—

"I would like all who are working on public bodies to read this book—the Town Councillor, the Member of Parliament, the Health Visitor, the Medical Officer of Health, the educated citizen, man and woman, whose views count so much for the development of public opinion and the promotion of reform—but, most of all, I would like the working man himself to read it. Perhaps he may then realise what his wife herself cannot put into words. . . .

"This sympathetic and tolerant, yet without uncompromising, view of the Mother in the Little House is without compare."

The problem presented is not that of a woman living in the slums. As Mrs. Eyles herself says, "The Mrs. Britain of whom I write is as far removed from the slums as is Grosvenor Square from Balham; she is not 'poor,' strictly speaking; in comparison she is quite well-to-do—the wife of a steady working man, a skilled labourer, a shop assistant, a Corporation worker, or a factory hand."

"I particularly want to make Mrs. Britain realise her own importance as mother of the next generation; she is too much shut within her four walls at present to see that she is, to some extent, carrying the race on her back. I feel that once she realises this she will begin to think out to better things for herself, her husband, and her children; and her thinking will take effect in the type of representative she sends to Parliament as well as in the type of children she starts in life."

"Fifty years ago," says the writer, "Science put a heavy foot on the accelerator of the world's engine, and has kept it there. Evolution ceased to be the gradual, beautiful thing it has been for millions of years; it bolted, and those driving the car have lost control a little. They can't see the road along which they are tearing. They know they will 'get there' some day, but in their path they are knocking down and hurting thousands who could easily board the car and be carried

along. It is to help the mothers of the working class to board the car, and bring their men folk and their children along with them, that I have hammered out a few difficulties in this book.

"I don't think many people have seen the immense importance of teaching everyone the elementary rules of physiology and psychology. I feel I cannot too strongly protest against the attitude of the lady novelist who recently, in a Sunday paper, urged that the secrets of reproduction should remain 'beautiful mysteries.' This attitude would be defensible if we were all in the Eden state of childish loving-kindness and 'simple faith.' But we are not. Centuries of muddling unhappiness have made humanity essentially suspicious; anything mysterious is invested with uncleanness. That the most vital fact of life—reproduction—should be made the subject of ignorant, half-fearful, half-lewd experiment seems to me appalling—and it is appalling in its results, as a glance at the statistics of divorce, illegitimacy and venereal diseases will show. . . .

"Love—married love, at any rate—rests on a physical foundation, except in a very few, very unusual cases; that is to say, it passes through the gate of physical passion to a comradeship and serenity fulfilling 'each day's most quiet need by sun and candle-light,' with occasional little excursions back to the gateway in search of romance and mutual adventure. . . .

"Married life is a game—a great game, too. There are rules to be learnt before it can be played successfully. It is surely at least as skilled a game as cricket or football! But for lack of instruction people are playing lone hands at present. Education in elementary physiology and psychology would co-ordinate them most effectively—it would remove the barnacles of ignorance, puritanism, over-indulgence and lewdness, that make the sex problem one that clean-minded people turn from with nausea. . . .

"I think, too, that it is impossible to overstress the importance of married women's loss of sleep during the child-bearing and child-rearing periods; it accounts for so much of the hysteria, the lack of balance, the bad temper of which such women are accused. . . . For a working-class woman, who combines in one tired personality the careers of mother, wife, nurse, cook, housemaid, bargain-hunter, laundress, and dressmaker, to become hysterical and mentally unbalanced is sheer disaster. Her children have no escape except for a few hours in the streets, from which they have to return to nagging and disorder. The tiny ones have not even so much escape as this; they are fastened up in the backyard or the kitchen, always in the way, cuffed and scolded, not because they are naughty, but because poor mother is cross and tired. The husband escapes to the pub., or—this is important nowadays—to the political club or federation.

"I believe that the political revolutions that end in bombs and massacres begin with the tired neurotic women in the Little Houses: they so rake up the men folk, who have not the comprehension to

* By M. L. EYLES. (Grant Richards, Ltd., St. Martin's Lane, London. 4s. 6d. net.)

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