

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"THE PITIFUL WIFE."*

Once or twice perhaps in a generation we are given a book which is a work of genius. Of such were "The Story of An African Farm" and "The Magnetic North"; and of such is "The Pitiful Wife," by Storm Jameson, which should be read and re-read.

The author has the art of narration which makes the Yorkshire moors live before us—their grandeur, their bleakness, their wildness, and, in contrast, their sweetness.

"In summer, the moorland air bears in its bosom the most subtle of all the wandering airy scents of earth, bitter as death, sharp as a blade edge, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. There is none like it, nor any other that so takes the heart with longing. This all North Riding folk know, and all men born in moorland places. The moor men wander over the earth, avid of new dangers. In all strange lands where they go the sweet harsh scent of an English moor whispers with the blood in their veins, and when they die last of all kindly earth things they remember it, when love weeps unheeded and life itself is little but a memory."

"On a summer morning a child called Jael ran across the lawns of Trudesthorp. Her flying feet left dark prints on the dewy turf. Her eyes were wide and bright in the sunlight and her small brown hands rested on the stem of a young birch tree. Suddenly below her in the valley the mists parted and a shaft of sunlight poured down where the beck ran softly into a brown pool. Then the pool was a pool of living light. A fire stirred in its shallows, and the waters fell apart into a hundred silver flames that leaped quivering in the burnished air. A tree leaned over the water, so green and shining that it seemed new come from God.

"The child's eyes filled with tears. She laid a hand upon her breast; her throat swelled, and her small heart laboured, surcharged with joy. The mists swept back. With a rush like the swoop of a wing, Jael vanished behind the house, leaving the garden empty."

To a child so sensitive to beauty, life could never be an easy thing, a great capacity for pleasure carries with it a corresponding capacity for pain. Nor was her childhood an easy one. "Jael set teeth into her joys and sorrows and held on like a young stoat. She had no sense at all in such things. Jael happy was joy made visible. Her face burned with a delicate flame and her eyes blazed out the light within. Jael beaten or repulsed tumbled straightway into a pit of grief and became dazed and foolish with grieving—a completely daft little Jael."

Jael's mother died when her brother was born, and she and the small Jude ran wild in the care of servants, and then suddenly into her life came

Richmond Drew, the son of the owner of a neighbouring estate. "She did not know why she laughed nor why the lark's song, rising from the lower meadow, filled her with such joy. She looked again at Richmond and he at her. Her heart that, though she knew it not, had been so passionately waiting, flew straightway into his careless keeping. She did not know that she was no longer free but captive—Jael captive, caught and held in the glance of vivid eyes and challenge of mocking mouth. She only knew that the grass under her feet was alive with magic, and magic the tree that lifted its young green against the dazzling sky.

Years after he spoke to her of love. He told her that nothing but love makes marriage right. "To marry, you must love so that the other person is as much you as you are yourself. You must love with your mind and your soul and your body, and not keep back anything. Love of the body would be nothing—nothing at all—without the other things."

The day came when she told him, "I love you, Richmond, didn't you know?"

"O, Jael, I—worship you," he said.

Later he realised Jael's need of her mother, in spite of hints from an old servant.

"Don't you *know* what Theodocia meant?" he asked.

"No," said Jael, and would have left it there, but Richmond was shocked past speech. His dismay would have been comic if it had not been so boyishly vehement. He felt suddenly very wise and full of love. He put an arm round her thin shoulders and said, "You must make Theodocia tell you just what she meant. This very night. Promise me, Jael."

"Obediently, Jael promised."

When they next met, he said, "I am wondering if Theodocia made you happier—or not so happy."

"Jael said gravely, 'Theodocia said that I must never stay with you too long or let you hold me too closely.'

"Is that all she said?"

"Jael nodded."

"He put her gently off his knee, making her sit beside him on the rock.

"He made his voice gentle to tell her what Theodocia meant, simply, and with the most loving care. He did not falter for words, though his heart and his whole body ached for her, sitting with folded hands beside him in the cool night, while, compassionate as a mother, he took her childhood reverently from her. He did but serve his lady with his passionate boy's innocence as later he meant to serve her with his man's strength and wit.

"She neither looked nor spoke, but lifted his hand and laid her cheek against it. . . . He did not learn then, nor, indeed, for many years, to what a white flame of adoration Jael came, thinking of his kindness. Perhaps if she had talked more readily, he had spared himself and her much of what afterwards happened to their hurt."

So their idyll prospered and Mrs. Hender, the

*By Storm Jameson. Constable & Co., Ltd., London, W.C.2.

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