

Women, National Council of Women, Victoria League, Overseas League, Y.W.C.A., Y.M.C.A., English-Speaking Union, Lady Frances Ryder's Organisation, Empire Parliamentary Association, Girls' Friendly Society.

There is also a General Committee representative of women's organisations.

BOOK OF THE MONTH.

THE GATES OF PARADISE.*

This alluring title is not, as might be supposed, a purely imaginary one. It refers to a "garden planted long ago in a desolate valley at the foot of the crazy cliffs of Alamût, the eagle's nest high above the southern shores of the Caspian Sea; but forsaken these many centuries. A little acre of roses and fruit-trees set about with dark cypresses and ornamented with white pavilions, marble fountains, and lily pools. A garden laid out by Hassan as-Sabbah, that corpulent and notorious Persian with the dyed red beard and the round protruding eyes; half mystic, half scoundrel, better known to posterity under the sinister name of the Old Man of the Mountain. He laid it out with cunning and skill that it might resemble the Garden of Paradise of which the Prophet speaks in the Korân; nay, more, he designed it that it should be regarded by his hashish-drugged disciples as Paradise itself.

There were many tales told of that garden in the mountains, tales of distracted lovers, and the laughter of hashish dreams, of madness and assassination, of religious ecstasy, and the indomitable and hypnotic will of the Master of the Garden.

The Sultan of Persia, Melik Shah, in the year A.D. 1092 gave authorisation to his Wazir at Nishapûr to inquire secretly into the doings of Hassan up there in the mountains. Of the Sultan's most illustrious court the name of only one member is widely familiar to the ears to-day—Omar Khayyâm, who, it may surprise some of us to learn, was an astronomer as well as poet.

The whole of this absorbing book is full of romance of a high order. Romance of nature, of learning and culture, and, dominating all, the human romance typified by the young Yusuf, a protégé of Omar, who loved wildly the beautiful Leila, who, all unknown to the youth, had been the mistress of Mansûr, whose tragic death is described in the early pages of the book.

Leila was of lowly origin, and lived with her mother in a poor part of the town. She was regarded as light of character by her equals, but with the exception of her relations with Mansûr she was proud and exclusive.

"Two years ago she had been carried away by the lusty force of his presence, and when he had vaulted over the wall which divided his land from hers and had taken her in his powerful arms, the thought of resistance had run laughing from her. Since his illness, however, it was pity and fidelity rather than affection that held her." She was educated above her station and was one of the few girls of her class that could both read and write.

The picture that is drawn of her fires the imagination—dressed in the picturesque garb of her nation, her eyes dark gentle things—gentle because they were made mysterious by a fringe of dark lashes—having fire in them at times and at times a sparkle like ice.

Such was the girl whom young unawakened Yusuf, student and dreamer, first loved in the season of roses, which is the Persian name for spring—loved madly, consumingly, till lured by the terrible Hassan to his hashish-drugged doom in the Garden of Paradise.

Leila had always been a mystery to the youth, and Hasan's wily suggestion that she was not of earth but an houris from the Garden of Paradise found credence in his brain and caused him to fall a victim to Hassan who, for

political reasons had caused Leila to be kidnapped, and whom he used as a bait to decoy her unfortunate young lover.

How terrible is the scene in which Yusuf sells his soul for a sight of his beloved!

The hashish-drugged boy is conveyed to the Garden of Paradise, where he once more beholds his adored.

"What has Hassan told you about me," she asks, her mouth trembling, her mind mystified.

"That this intoxicating Paradise is your home, that you were banished to the miserable earth below and that my poor love has gained your pardon from God. Hassan has brought me here on the paths of the wind. I have flown under a thousand rainbows and through unheard of sunrises to reach you. And here in Paradise I have found you at last."

She looked at him with sudden maternal solicitude.

"But this is not Paradise," she said, touching him with her hands and her hair, as she bent over him like a motherly little tree. "I am a woman. You are a man."

A sudden thought came to her. "What has Hassan given you to drink?"

"I am not drunk," he smiled, putting his arms about her. "I have given my soul into his keeping that I might join you here in the Garden of Delight."

Yusuf, still drugged, is compelled by his tyrant master to assassinate the aged Nizam, and is himself assassinated in the act. He dies in Leila's arms, who in her compassionate love assures him that he need not fear separation as they are indeed in the Garden of Paradise.

"Even now we are beside the Fount Selsabil, the Softly-flowing. Can you not hear the tinkle of its cool waters?"

Omar made lament: "O Yusuf, Yusuf, whither are you gone. O nightingale of a thousand songs. O bird of longing still singing in my breast, whither are you flown?"

H. H.

COMING EVENTS.

January 18th.—Meeting General Nursing Council for England and Wales. Ministry of Health, Whitehall, S.W. 2.30 p.m.

January 19th.—The Matrons' Council of Great Britain and Ireland. Annual Meeting, 194, Queen's Gate, S.W. 3 p.m. Miss Kathleen Smith, S.R.N., R.R.C., President, in the chair.

January 23rd.—Meeting Registered Nurses' Parliamentary Council, 431, Oxford Street, W. 4.30 p.m.

January 23rd.—Irish Matrons' Association. Meeting at the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin. 4 p.m.

The Royal British Nurses' Association, 194, Queen's Gate, S.W.

January 26th.—Whist Drive in aid of Helena Benevolent Fund. 7.30 p.m. Tickets and refreshments, 2s.

February 1st.—Dance. 8 p.m. Tickets and refreshments, 5s.

February 21st.—Reception to meet Her Royal Highness the Princess Arthur of Connaught, S.R.N., President of the Association.

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* By Arthur Weigall. (Fisher Unwin.)

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