

BOOK OF THE MONTH.*

DOOMSDAY.

A Sussex farm makes a charming basis for a romance, and our quarrel with Mr. Warwick Deeping is that he wanders too soon from that attractive environment into an artificial world. We could have been content with much more of his rural setting.

However, "Cinder Town" is first on the stage, which was the disparaging soubriquet for the Sandhurst Estate, where the new poor put up cottages and bungalows. "Green Shutters" was the particular cottage where Mary Viner had come to live with her father, Captain Hesketh Viner, and her little foolish mother who had a voice like a rather futile and busy bird.

Pretty Mary was not at all resigned to her life in this gimcrack cottage—far from it. If there was one thing she loathed it was cleaning out a grate on a cold winter morning. A beastly job, remaining eternally beastly.

Arnold Furze, gentleman farmer, up at "Doomsday," brought the milk himself one winter morning when Mary was engaged on the detested work, and he considered the problem on his way home—the problem of impoverished gentlefolk, drawn together in a little world of makeshifts, and keeping up appearances. It was rather pathetic.

And that girl with the smudgy face and the soft coal-dust eyes who had taken in the milk. Deputising as a maid-of-all-work?

Furze's life at Doomsday was very primitive and not unlike a colonist's, a concentration upon the essential soil and its products, an ignoring of individual comfort. War gratuity, savings, a thousand pounds an aunt had left him, Doomsday, derelict and lonely, had swallowed them all. He had slept in his camp bed, washed in a bucket, used a box as a table, another as a seat, camping out in one room of the rambling and empty house. He had one extravagance, a baby-grand piano in a rosewood case, bought at a sale.

Furze went a-wooing Mary Viner—"Cinderella," he had christened her.

"Go when you please to the farm, and take what you please, fruit, flowers, anything."

He moved out into the road, and she felt herself drawn out into the dusk. The spell of his tenderness was upon her, the gentle lure of his strength. And there may have been some curiosity behind her vague emotion, and a little thrill of conscious power. They parted there—she going back to her dull little house, and he to the great spaces of his fields and woodlands. She wanted Arnold Furze the man, but not Arnold Furze the farmer.

Marriage should be comfortable; it needed cushions. Lovers might be content with a hay cock or a bank of heather; marriage was a house to be lived in. And Arnold in his honest, simple love was buying furniture for the old farm at a neighbouring sale; but the cynosure of the day's happenings was a rose lustre tea-service carefully packed in a box.

We are given a delightful picture of the preparations for the tea party to which Furze had bidden Mary with her father and mother.

If Mary could have seen him. The big deliberate thing with his sensitive hands, arranging the flowers and cutting bread and butter; it would have won him most women, the women who have touched the little, trivial, pathetic things of life.

But Mary did not see it quite that way. She wished to be served by a spruce young woman with a bobbed head and white laced apron. Her surrender to his tenderness is all the while mixed with a vague resentment that she, Mary

Viner, should only escape from hated drudgery to drudgery in other surroundings.

The morning after an emotional evening with her lover, Mary caught the early morning train to Weyfleet, where lived her pretty, worldly, married sister, Clare.

She had run away from her poor lover, and her running away had made her angry with him. Clare and her husband had reinforced this anger. "A common drudge in a farmer's house." She would take Clare's advice and quickly forget those kisses. Yet there was a secret part of her that was a little sad, and ashamed.

Mary's prosperous and fashionable sister married her to Percival Fream, a man of fabulous wealth, who might have been an old thirty or a young fifty. She quickly displayed an aptitude for spending her "grandee's" wealth, and apparently without a pang left "Cinder Town" and her old sordid life behind her.

Arnold Furze's heart was caught in the rebound by a big gentle-eyed girl, free from moods, who found delight in sharing her man's joys and sorrows. She was killed in a motor accident and died in her husband's arms after two years' or so of happy comradeship. That Furze should pretend to be inconsolable at the death of his wife caused Mary a vague dissatisfaction. What manner of woman had she been, this common girl whom he had married?

Had she been good to look at and pleasant to kiss?

She could not raise her mood to other imaginings or divine the richness of Rose's love, its brave and simple directness, its practical tenderness, its motherliness, its strength. Poor little suburban madam. She stood there looking at a flickering candle, feeling distraught and peeved and resentful and also vaguely defiant. Mrs. Fream, of Hill House—Furze had never forgiven her treatment of him, and such women as Mary must needs be provocative; but nothing could excuse a certain ugly incident, in which Furze forgot all chivalry and self-control. Mary's "grandee" did not long outlive Furze's wife. He left her penniless, and she once more found herself in "Cinder Town" on the threshold of Doomsday Farm.

Finding Furze obdurate, though she sensed something of his old love for her behind his seeming antagonism, she took the daring step of establishing herself as his housekeeper in order that they might test their feeling one for the other.

At meals they sat decorously opposite each other, uneasily self-possessed, while between them stood that bowl of mystic fruit towards which neither would stretch out a hand.

We are left in the dark as to the nature of their relationship at the close of the book; but it is a pity that there should be any doubt on that subject. Or is matrimony in these modern times too dull a sequel to romance?

H. H.

COMING EVENTS.

May 20th.—General Nursing Council for England and Wales, monthly meeting, 20, Portland Place, W. 2.30 p.m.

May 28th.—British College of Nurses, meeting of Council, 39, Portland Place, London, W., 3 p.m.

June 7th.—Kent County Mental Hospital, Maidstone. Official Opening of the Nurses' Home by Her Royal Highness Princess Mary, Viscountess Lascelles. 2.30 p.m.

June 9th and 10th.—British College of Nurses, View-Day at Headquarters, 39, Portland Place, London, W. 2.30-6 p.m.

July 4th.—League of St. Bartholomew's Hospital Nurses General Meeting at the Hospital, 3 p.m. Social Gathering in Great Hall after meeting.

July 27th-30th.—International Council of Nurses, Geneva, Switzerland.

*By Warwick Deeping (Cassell & Co.)

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