

## BOOK OF THE MONTH.

## EARLY AUTUMN.\*

There are some writers who compel attention by sheer charm of their literary style, independently of the story itself, and this volume combines both in a very unusual manner.

It is the story of the Pentlands, a New England family, in which all of them, remarkable in their way, are made vividly to live, and to impress their personality upon the reader.

It begins, so far as the story is concerned, with a ball, given in the honour of Sybil, the young daughter of the house, just returned from school in Paris, where she had been sent by her mother against the advice of the conservative members of the family.

The first ball for forty years, to which the whole of the countryside was invited, with the idea of showing the world that the family had lost none of its prestige for all the lack of young people in its ranks.

Family was the god of the Pentlands.

At this ball one is introduced to Sybil's mother, Olivia, a soft woman of gentleness and poise, whom you did not notice all at once, but became aware of slowly, as if her presence had the effect of stealing over you with the vagueness of a perfume. One knew her at once for a great lady.

Aunt Cassie was present, her sharp black eyes surveying the ball with a faint air of disapproval.

It was Sabine, who, at forty-five, was fascinating and spiteful, who observed that Aunt Cassie and her "lady companion," Miss Peavey, sitting on the steps together resembled a crow and a pouter pigeon. Poor Miss Peavey, whose mission it was to listen patiently to the mythical virtue of the late Mr. Struthers.

The head of the family, old John Pentland, lived here with the younger members in this old quiet family mansion, where "kind Mr. Longfellow and the immortal Messrs. Emerson and Lowell had once sat and talked of life," and where his son Anson, Olivia's husband, spent his days in compiling laboriously a book known as "The Pentland Family and the Massachusetts Bay Colony." A man of forty-five who looked older, with a long horse face like Aunt Cassie's.

Very subtly is conveyed the atmosphere of such an environment, peaceful, comfortable, pompous and deadening, and Olivia had endured it for twenty years, since she came as a young inexperienced girl-bride—an outsider as they dimly thought of her. Her own stifled existence made her determine that Sybil should not be sacrificed to the Family.

In deference to her husband's wishes she questions Sybil as to her feelings for O'Hara.

"Yes, I like him very much. But . . . but . . ." she laughed softly, "You're not worrying about my marrying him, my falling in love—because you needn't. I'm fond of him because he's the one person around here who does the things I like, and well—he's an interesting man. When he talks, he makes sense. But don't worry; I shan't marry him."

Olivia kept thinking how much better a chance Sybil had for happiness than she herself.

"It will be someone like O'Hara," Sybil continued. "Someone who is very much alive—only not middle-aged like O'Hara. I'm sure I'll know the man when I see him." She leaned forward and said earnestly, "Couldn't you tell when you were a girl?"

"Yes," said Olivia softly, "I could tell."

It was on a superb night, hot—as a summer night should

be—but clear too, so that the whole sky was like a sapphire dome, studded with diamonds, that she approached O'Hara on the subject.

"I'll tell you then," he was saying, "I've been seeing a good deal of Sybil in the hope that I should see a little of her mother."

The romance of Olivia's life had come late, but it was old John Pentland that saved her from a false step. He was telling her of the tragedy of his own life, his mad wife, and his long attachment to old Mrs. Soames.

"I came to know what being in love might be when I met Mrs. Soames. Only then," he repeated, "it was too late. I couldn't abandon *her* (his wife). I wanted you to know, my dear Olivia . . . that I have never been unfaithful to her, not once since my wedding night. I know the world will never believe it, but I wanted you to know because you see, you and Mrs. Soames are the only ones who matter to me . . . and she *knows* it is true. You see, Olivia, there are things which people like us can't do:

"Perhaps it's because we're weak or foolish—who knows? But it's true."

The old man was killed shortly afterwards by a fall from his horse, whether by accident or design was conjectural.

"Perhaps, perhaps," thought Olivia, "he did it to keep me here."

She told O'Hara, "Now it is impossible. While he was living I might have gone away with you. Please leave me in peace." She suddenly felt a prolonged peace, such as she had not known for years. It was over and done now, and life would go on the same, filled with trickiness and boredom and deceptions, but pleasant too in spite of everything, because as John Pentland had said, "one had sometimes to pretend."

She knew now that she would never escape, she had been too long part of Pentlands, and she knew what the old man had said was the truth.

She had acted thus, not because of duty, or promises, or nobility, or pride, or even out of virtue.

She knew that she had acted thus, because, as he said, "There are things, Olivia, which people like us cannot do."

H. H.

## COMING EVENTS.

*March 11th.*—Opening by Her Majesty the Queen of the new Nurses' Home, Metropolitan Hospital, Kingsland Road, E. 3 p.m.

*March 18th.*—Meeting General Nursing Council for England and Wales. 2.30 p.m.

*March 26th.*—Meeting of the Council, The British College of Nurses. 431, Oxford Street, London, W.1. 3 p.m.

*April 29th.*—The British College of Nurses Diploma Day. Hoare Memorial Hall, Church House, Westminster, S.W. Presentation of Diplomas to Fellows and Members.

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

## The British College of Nurses.

ADDRESSES ON THE AIMS OF THE COLLEGE BY  
MRS. LANCELOT ANDREWS.

*March 7th.*—London Temperance Hospital, 8.40 p.m.

*March 8th.*—Highgate Hospital, 9 p.m.

*March 9th.*—Royal Northern Hospital, 8.30 p.m.

*March 10th.*—Fulham Hospital, Hammersmith, 9 p.m.

*March 23rd.*—King Edward Memorial Hospital, Ealing, 8.30 p.m.

\* By Louis Bromfield. (Jonathan Cape, London.)

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