

BOOK NOTES

"MARRIAGE A LA MODE"—By Mrs. Humphry Ward. Musson Book Co., Toronto.

A NOVEL by Mrs. Humphry Ward is always an event in the reading world. Marriage a la Mode, the latest creation of the author of Robert Elsmere, attracted wide attention during its serial run in America and Europe. It appears now in book form and its sale is already assured.

Mrs. Ward's claim to popularity is that she is interesting—intellectually so. She discusses problems of the day, and her readers are led unconsciously to think about them also. She permits no sensationalism or suggestion of yellow journalism in the handling of her themes; every idea appears rational and logical; the whole conception and expression is the perfection of literary taste and style. Her work is an inspiration to the reader.

Hitherto Mrs. Ward has found material for her novels in the social life of Europe. She now treats of American society for the first time.

Marriage a la Mode is the culmination of the author's recent trip to the United States and Canada. Canada does not cut much figure in it. A kaleidoscopic description of a railway journey from Toronto to Niagara, with a vivid picture of the electric power works at Niagara—that is about all. Evidently our prosaic existence did not appeal to Mrs. Ward. The romantic possibilities of the Republic were much greater to her eyes. There they have big public questions. Mrs. Ward's mind loves to wrestle with anything of that nature. She found something that suited her mental stature in the great divorce evil. That problem of the most tremendous import to the welfare of the American nation at the present moment, is the motif of Marriage a la Mode.

The divorce fad has spread so rapidly in the United States that it is almost an accepted necessity of the people. A man must have a new wife just as a fresh cigar when a former one has served its purpose; a woman requires another husband like she does an additional dress when the old one has grown somewhat shabby and no longer pleases her vanity. Mrs. Ward blames her own sex almost entirely for the progress of divorce. A passage from Marriage a la Mode will illustrate her opinion:

"It is the women who bring the majority of the actions. . . . It is not passion that dictates the majority of these actions; no serious cause or feeling indeed of any kind; but rather an ever-spreading restlessness and levity, a readiness to tamper with the very foundations of society, for a whim, a nothing!—in the interests often of what women call their individuality!"

Daphne Floyd, the heroine of Mrs. Ward's novel, is the type of the wealthy irresponsible, modern American woman described above. Young, beautiful, accomplished, heirless to millions, polished by contact with the very highest educational advantages American civilisation can offer, she should have been a source of congratulation to that civilisation. But Daphne Floyd recognises no obligation to society for its generosity. Her whole being was centered in herself. She marries in a moment of impulse young Roger Barnes, Oxford man, of good family, poor, of a country where it is a crime to be poor—not because she ever en-

tertained the thought of the match being advantageous to the state; not because she ever loved him; but because he was good-looking, was considered "quite the thing" with his titled family, accent and the rest. Barnes takes her off to his ancestral English home. There she immediately arouses the enmity of her husband's exclusive relations with her advanced ideas on art, society and household management. Having subdued these slow people by means of her American business audacity and push, she now picks faults in her husband. His "happy-go-lucky" squire habits disgust her. Then, Mrs. Fairmille, an old flame of Roger's turns up unexpectedly. Daphne, being aware of Roger's early relations with this woman, grows insanely jealous of her. Finally she accuses Roger of unfaithfulness. Roger, though innocent, cannot satisfy her as to his inculpability. In truth, she is tired of him. She trumps up a charge against him and flees to the States with her child. Roger follows in vain. A settlement cannot be reached. The divorce laws do the rest, though Roger still remains her husband according to English law. He now plunges into a wild career of dissipation. The ravages of this, and the weight of his trouble brings him almost to death's door. His friends make every effort to effect a reconciliation with his wife. At last, owing to the pleading of one of them who meets her at Niagara, she consents to return to England for an interview with her divorced husband. She does so. But Daphne and Roger could never be united again; she did not "measure up to him."

That is an outline of the main story in brief, but its power must be read to be realised. As a piece of execution it will rank as the best work Mrs. Ward has done yet. The story moves from point to point with the swiftness of a drama; the characters enter and leave the stage at the exact and proper moment; there is nothing superfluous—no empty, long-winded descriptions to retard and pad the story. You have the story told in the best manner Mrs. Humphry Ward can tell it, and when it is over the book is done. The book is packed with terse passages. Take the widely-quoted description of Roosevelt, page 72, too long to be quoted here. It is not far from literature, we think. On the whole, this novel is decidedly the best book of the present season, and should receive a wide reception from thinking readers everywhere.

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"SPECIAL MESSENGER"—By R. W. Chambers. Appleton's.

Robert W. Chambers writes the best light romantic story in America. He has a tendency to over-colouration and strained emotion, but these faults are overshadowed by his brilliancy of delineation. Mr. Chambers has of late years given us strong and vivid pictures of fashionable New York society life. The clash of arms now attracts him, and, in the "Special Messenger" we have some short stories of the American Civil war. The Special Messenger is a spy in the Union army, a daring young woman, an altogether charming creation of American womanhood who will afford an altogether delightful subject for an hour's dreamy reflection, on an idle afternoon, in a hammock, with a pipe to help things along. A capital summer book.



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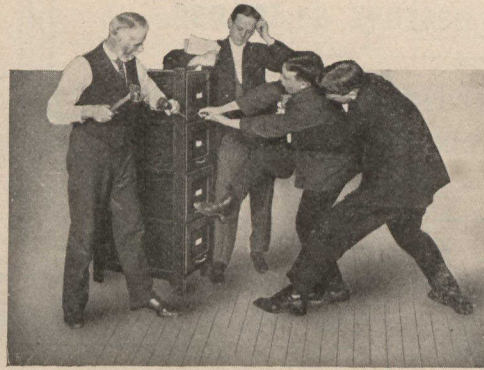
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