

THE CRITIC.

BURIED in a catalogue beneath an innumerable heap of names of new books I lighted the other day upon the taking title "How to Get Married although a Woman, by a Young Widow" (New York: Ogilvie). Conjecture pointed to a work written probably "to order" and "to sell." Its very name savoured of the sensational. The "Young Widow," too, sounded not a little suspicious. At best, one thought, such a book will descend upon how by artificial, not to say meretricious, methods the fascinating sex will be taught how, with even greater success than at present, they may lure on the susceptible sex, more especially as the alternative title happened to be "or, the Art of Pleasing Men." The mind wandered to the infinite possibilities contained in coquetry carried to a still finer point, to the complicated manœuvres of courtship, to costume even, and to such subtle and recondite articles as "Bloom of Youth" or "Poudre d'Amour." However, I ordered the book—price twenty-five cents—and was most agreeably surprised. Despite wretched binding and perhaps still more wretched style, this little book deserves, if not unqualified, yet a very large measure of commendation. True, the English in which it is written is not the English of Matthew Arnold, neither perhaps is the grammar always the grammar of Linley Murray. The class for which the "Young Widow" writes, too, is not the class of Vere de Vere; it is the class of young women who possess "gentlemen friends," and who enjoy being "treated" to "ice-creams" at a "rest'rant" by these same "gentleman friends"—all, no doubt, very well in their way. And, after all, it is a way common enough to all classes, only that the class of Vere de Vere denominates these items by a different terminology: one very eminent writer of the same sex as the "Young Widow," for example, would probably descend to nothing lower than white-bait at the Star and Garter. Be this as it may, the reader of "How to Get Married although a Woman" who can shut his eyes to minor faults and differences of tastes and customs, will find in it some homely truths sadly in need of being expressed; and he will find these truths expressed in that simple straightforward manner that at once bespeaks the sincerity of the writer—and in these days of hasty and prolific writing, when one is tempted to think that four-fifths of the books written are not the result of unsought inward "constraint" (in the Biblical signification of that word), but rather the result of extraneous pecuniary pressure—this sincerity at once commands our sympathy and interest. And both the one and the other are aroused from the outset.

The object of the "Young Widow" is plain and to the point: "In the hope," she says, "that some of these maidens (who 'know so fearfully much! The experiences of a mature woman count for nothing beside the wonderful knowledge some girls in their teens have!') will be willing to read what they would not hear, when it was too personal, I determined to write down what I know about being attractive to the other sex, what I know about girls' failures, and why they fail," and this she proceeds to do without any nonsense—indeed with a very great deal of common sense—in some nine chapters with such headings as "The Girl whom Men Like," "The Girl who Wins," "The Girl who Fails," "Some Unfailing Methods," and so forth.

But the reader will already be impatient to know what talisman, if any, the "Young Widow" possesses who so openly sets up as a teacher of the methods of attracting men. Let her speak for herself: "Sweetness of mind and manner is a woman's greatest charm. A sweet woman is beloved by everyone. It is woman's province to be sweet. Gail Hamilton says: 'It is the first duty of woman to be a lady.' I say, it is her first duty, after being a Christian (which is certainly first of everything), to be sweet."—"A girl may be more than plain, even homely, but if her manners are gentle, her voice sweet and low, her bearing womanly, her power is wonderful."—"A man avoids a sentimental girl. . . . Do not model your conduct after the heroines of novels."—"Let the first man upon whom you try your winning arts be your father. Make him sure that you are the most perfect of girls. Then try your brothers. As the most lovely of daughters and sisters, you will be real when you are attracting other men by your winning manners."—"A retiring, gentle girl is something to seek after. . . . A bold girl may receive more attentions from a certain class of men, but less love in the long run. That 'certain class of men' you want to avoid instead of seeking to attract them."—"Do not hesitate to let him see that you have a modest, maidenly interest in him. Men like that. It must be done in a retiring way, as if you did not intend to have him see it, but could not help yourself. While a man will boast of a girl running after him, this little secret of yours, which by his acuteness (!) he has discovered, he will keep sacredly to himself."—"A girl's great charm is a sweet womanly modesty, which appears to hide a love she cannot help feeling."—"Learn to soothe and sympathize instead of hurting. . . . The outside world will give him knocks enough as he battles his way up in it. . . . Maybe he comes to you sometimes just smarting from one. Let him find for his wounds a balm."—"Your power over man is very great, girls; you can make him good or bad, if he loves you." But it is a pity to attempt an exhibition of the writer's views by such a paltry collection of specimen bricks—all the more as the book abounds in material of which these give no adequate idea. These merely show that the author has her subject

at heart; and is giving honest expression with pure motives to what she sees and feels—and without doubt she sees and feels much. There are throughout her book also many piquant sentences, and not a little plain speaking.

Naturally enough the "Young Widow" cannot write a whole book on how to please the men without letting it appear here and there how she herself regards that sex; and she is so naively out-spoken when she does express any views about them that they are worth quoting. "Never forget," she says quite earnestly, "that a man is a selfish being. Keep that little fact in view continually; and if you want to please him pander to it."—"It is man-like to walk off at the first sign of a storm (at home), and to avoid everything uncomfortable. Bear that in mind."—"A man likes a sensible girl. He likes real, good common sense."—"Man is not sympathetic. Men rarely are, but then you must take them as you find them."—"Do not exact too much attention. A man hates to give it where it is exacted, even when it is your right. It is their way to pay it only when they feel like doing so. A man never wants to be controlled."—"Promote his comfort in every possible way. They notice these things and like such attentions."—"The girl thinks of matrimony before the man does. He goes on blindly and thoughtlessly until he is so deep in love he cannot retreat."—"A man never allows the same girl to make him feel like a fool twice. Once is enough for any man."—"When you seek to win a man, make him pleased with himself. The better he is pleased with himself the better he will like you. This is not done by bold, outspoken flattery (although a man will swallow larger doses of that than you suppose), but by adroitly showing him his own best side."—"A man is self-centred. He loves to talk about himself."—"A girl who has made a man think less of himself may give that man up on the spot."—"A girl trusts to romantic surroundings. A widow never does. She has found out that her hero is fleshly, and she knows that all men are. She knows that only a boy, wildly in love, prefers moonlight to a substantial meal."—The unconscious humour of some of these assertions is refreshing. But the book should be read; quotations are always unsatisfactory.

GOOD-NIGHT.

The wind has veered from south to east,

The wearied sun has sought the west,
Sweet eventide to man and beast

Proclaims the solemn hour of rest;
And you and I, in silence, wait
To say our "Good-night" at the gate.

God's will be done. Your cold lips move
As though the solace you would give
Failed your heart's need. The words can prove
No comfort to such cares that live
Within our hearts; mayhap they may
Bring solace on a distant day.

Love never was resigned to part;
Life never sought the darkened room
When lighted Palaces of Art
Invited from the path of gloom;
Yet when Fate bids we must obey
And walk the path from gold to grey.

God's will be done. My love, how bare
Sound those familiar words to-night!
The heart rebels against the prayer
When trust and hope are dead. How slight
Is the avail of prayers like this,
When *our* will is opposed to His!

"At eventide there shall be light."
And must life's noon be lived in vain
And hold no sweetness to requite
Its bitterness, and toil, and pain?
And must the joys we hold most dear
Be evermore untasted here?

My love, I cannot say "Good-night,"
And give your lips the farewell kiss,
And know that, with the fading light,
The last remaining hope of bliss
Expires; and henceforth all our days
Must blindly follow different ways.

And yet, perchance, a light may burst
Upon our lives in future years;
Perhaps the passion we have nursed
And bitterly regret in tears,
For lack of sunlight, may be cast;
Upon the dust-heap of the Past.

Of what avail then is our grief?
Of what avail are all our fears?
Though time may never bring relief,
Yet "He shall wipe away all tears."
Our way is dark, and so we must
In heaven place a deeper trust.

"He giveth His beloved rest."
My love, your farewell words are sweet,
And, pillowed safely on His Breast,
Love's perfectness shall be complete;
Farewell until the goal is won;
My love, Good-night—*God's will be done.*

A. MELBOURNE THOMPSON.

PROFESSOR ROBERTS ON WORDSWORTH.

AMONG the new books on the High School course for the ensuing year, Mr. Wetherell's "Selection from Wordsworth" holds a first place. Three of the leading names in Canadian literature add lustre to its pages,—Professor Clarke of Trinity, Professor Roberts of King's, and Principal Grant. In the preface to this volume of selections we find the following sentence: "The chief poet of Canada shows us clearly that Mathew Arnold's estimate of Wordsworth's genius is misleading and demands correction."

We turn to Professor Robert's essay, and meet an utterance that must make the student of Wordsworth pause: "Had Arnold belonged a generation later, or had he looked with the eyes of Continental criticism, we can hardly doubt that he would have placed Wordsworth amid, rather than above, the little band of great singers who made the youth of this century magnificent." This sentence, or rather the phrase, "with the eyes of Continental criticism," we believe to be unfair. No one was ever more thoroughly imbued with the Continental spirit, and no Englishman was more careful to bring European standards to his judgment of literary work than was Arnold. He was no insular critic, and it is as a universal critic that he judges Wordsworth's work in his famous essay.

Now with regard to Wordsworth's place above the other singers of this century, time and judicious criticism, and an understanding of what poetry really is, have, we believe, made his position assured. There are only four other names of his time in English poetry that can be mentioned with his,—Coleridge, Byron, Keats, and Shelley. While all of these were stronger in some one point, the faithful student of poetry and life will, we think, be compelled to accept Mathew Arnold's dictum: "Taking the performance of each as a whole, I say that Wordsworth seems to me to have left a body of poetical work superior in power, in interest, in the qualities which give enduring freshness, to that which any of the others has left." Each of the others had some grave defect. Coleridge, with a diseased will, left his mighty conceptions uncompleted, or so befogged in mystery, as to be of but little help to man; Byron was so sin-darkened that, though a naturally spontaneous thinker and brilliant singer, he has left a black stain on almost every page he has given us; Keats,—with the new-old truth, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—was cut off before he could achieve anything of really great ethical value for the human race. Shelley is perhaps the one singer that most critics of a poetic temperament would place before Wordsworth, and yet his most enthusiastic admirers amongst us must admit that the insanity or extravagance of his best productions keeps them from ever taking a front rank in poetic achievement. It is, after all, the poetry which is most valuable in its "application of ideas to life" that will take first place. And dramatic power, lyrical movement, epic grandeur, while being very good in their way, must rank as secondary,—mere accessories. It will be seen that we have spoken only of English poets. Professor Roberts in the early part of his essay mentioned the names of Heine, Hugo, Byron, Burns, and Shelley, but as Burns was not of this country, and as Hugh and Heine are never coupled with "the band of singers who made the youth of this century magnificent," we have dealt only with Wordsworth's contemporaries and compatriots.

Wordsworth has given us new eyes to see nature with, and although his range is very limited, he helps us to view humble life with greater truth, sympathy and fulness, than any other English poet; and for this reason Arnold has placed him first among our nineteenth century poets. Professor Roberts seems to us to be illogical in his criticism; at the close of his essay he says: "The distinctive excellence of Wordsworth's poetry is something so high, so ennobling, so renovating to the spirit, that it can be regarded as nothing short of a calamity for one to acquire a preconception which will seal him against its influence. One so sealed is deaf to the voice which, more than any other in modern song, conveys the secret of repose. To be shut out from hearing Wordsworth's message is to lose the surest guide we have to those regions of luminous calm which this breathless age so needs for its soul's health. Wordsworth's peculiar province is that border-land, wherein nature and the heart of man act and react upon each other. His vision is occupied not so much with nature as with the relations between nature and his inmost self. No other poet, of our race at least, has made so definite and intelligible the terms of our communion with external nature. But it must be always borne in mind that of great poets there are those like Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe, whose greatness is orbic and universal, and those again, of a lower station, whose greatness may be set forth as lying within certain more or less determinable limits. Among these latter, and high among them, we may be sure that Wordsworth will hold unassailable place."

Wordsworth, it is true, is limited, and is not as mighty a genius as Shakespeare, Milton, or Goethe, and this Arnold sees and emphasizes, but the other poets of this age were not only limited, but so erratic, as to be, in many instances, unhealthy in their effects. Whereas Wordsworth is always healthy and of ethical value, and it is this, I think, that Arnold means when he says: "I can read with pleasure and edification 'Peter Bell,' and the whole series of ecclesiastical sonnets, and the address to Mr. Wilkinson's spade, and even the 'Thanksgiving Ode';