



The WAY of LETTERS

"MARIE-CLAIRE," the literary sensation of Paris, has been translated into English, and is now being enjoyed and discussed on this side of the Atlantic. The account of the origin of this book is almost as interesting as the book itself. Marguerite Audoux, who was a young French seamstress, but who, curiously enough, was associated with some of the literary lights of Paris, undertook to write a book, and one would judge from what she has written that she had the uncommon sense to write about what she had experienced. From time to time she read chapters of her book to her literary friends, who, according to Mr. Arnold Bennett, encouraged her but did not attempt to guide her or criticise her work. At any rate, in due course of time the book was finished, and friends undertook to have it published in a manner that would give it a great deal of publicity. The author had already written a number of short stories and sketches, which her friends had succeeded in having published, and now she awaited the reception of her more ambitious essay. And what a reception! One wonders whether any reading public outside of Paris would have taken the book seriously. Whether they would or not, the work is one of tremendous artistic merit, so artistic indeed that one might ordinarily pass it by without at first coming into full sympathy with it. It is not a novel; it is merely a succession of personal inci-

dents told so naïvely and so simply and with such native charm that the secret of the whole thing is in the telling. Perhaps some idea of what "Marie-Claire" is may be formed from the idea that its literary style and subject is a direct negative in comparison with the positive of most writers: the incidents related are the very things that most writers would leave out altogether, and the style is so simple and unaffected that it is beautiful. But there is no plot, no purpose, no goal. The book doesn't arrive at anything; it stops just where one would expect it to begin or else to end with a dramatic climax. But there is no drama, no tragedy, nothing but a wonderfully refreshing and wholesome view of ordinary events of life. The book is written in the first person singular, and begins with the impressions of a little girl of about five years who is an orphan and who is taken to a convent. But it is not a retrospect, as one might think it would be, and it is not written with the insight that must have come in later years, but rather with the insight that was present when the events written about actually occurred. We have therefore an account of events as they were experienced by the child, not as they might have been interpreted in later years. The little things of daily life at the convent are recalled, but in a style that is sweet and undefiled. While the reader fancies at times that the events reveal to him little se-