

OUR TABLE.

"STUART OF DUNLEATH, A STORY OF THE PRESENT TIME," BY THE HON. CAROLINE NORTON, NEW-YORK. HARPER & BROTHERS.

THIS is one of the most fascinating novels we ever read. There are few of those which are constantly being issued from the teeming presses of the old and new world, which can compare with it in chasteness of style, and in brilliant and truthful delineation of character. Many of the personages introduced, are sketched with consummate skill, and all are marked by perfect individuality, showing, in the author, an acute observation of society in its various aspects and phases, and a deep knowledge of the workings of the human heart. The plot of the story without being involved, is intricate enough to excite strong interest and to keep it vividly awake, and it is sustained without diminution to the end of the book.

The incidents which succeed each other in the course of the story, are the most perfectly simple and natural in the world, there is no attempt at mystery or effect, but as we turn over leaf after leaf of this absorbing tale, we forget its fictitious character, and seem to be perusing a narrative of events which occurred to persons, and among scenes familiar to our previous knowledge, so vividly has the genius of the author impressed the stamp of reality upon her work. She has copied from nature, and been true alike to the outer life, and to the inner world of the human heart.

Eleanor Raymond, the heroine of the tale, is a most lovely creature. We first see her in her tender childhood :

"Pale, tranquil, with slight limbs, and bright, spiritual eyes, full of that peculiar expression, at once wild, shy and gentle, which the French denominate *faux*, with a general air of feebleness and languor, redeemed by a look of thought and intellect in the strait, fine forehead, and a certain degree of pride in the small melancholy mouth; a little taller than children of her age usually are; her hair a little longer, so than is common, and plaited by the skillful fingers of the Ayah in countless slender braids: such was Eleanor Raymond."

And as she advances step by step to womanhood, her character gaining firmness without losing its gentleness—her manner blending the shyness and simplicity of the child with the dignity and grace of the woman, her affections deepening to intensity, without losing aught of their purity; not striking by the brilliancy of her appearance, but fascinating by its perfect nymph-like harmony till—

"You felt, when all was said, that there stood the type of the old ideal loveliness, worshipped in the groves and temples of olden times; when the heathen heart, unenlightened and unable to reclaim even its divine aspirations from the trammels of sensuality, adored the creator in form instead of spirit and knelt to beauty as the nearest idea of God! Lone as a statue in a garden, she stood in that busy, murmuring world, and recalled to you other statues; fountains and fair columns; the dim aisles of foreign churches; the shadows of cypresses on warm Italian terraces; all the eye could conceive or remember of classic perfection. She was the beau-ideal of an artist's dream—the frontispiece to a poet's thought."

The remaining characters of the book are equally well portrayed and sustained. The weak, but gentle mother, the stern, un pitying, self-satisfied brother, the captivating lady Margaret, whose only fault was, that "she was a little vain of being so very charming," the coarse fox-hunting, Sir Stephen, his arrogant and vulgar sister, the wily, toad-eating "Tib," the common-place, Emma, the sylph duchess and her noble lord, and last but not least, the hero himself, Stuart of Dunleath, in whom there is much to love and admire, but who would never have done for the model hero of an old romance, though his faults and imperfections are so true to nature, that we can sympathize in most of them, and forgive all, except his blindness to the love of his little ward, and his cowardly attempt at suicide when he found the trust which he had betrayed must expose him to disgrace.

We commend the book to the perusal of all who have leisure and taste for such reading. It will well repay a perusal, and minister to the gratification both of the heart and the intellect.