

"MRS. HENRY WOOD: A MEMOIR, BY CHARLES W. WOOD."

In the preface to this book Mr. Wood tells us that these memoirs "are the fruit of a lifelong companionship; a similarity of tastes, a closeness and unity of occupation; an intimacy between mother and son perhaps never exceeded." There is, of course, often a danger in a son's writing a life of his mother, because the temptation to exaggerate and become rhapsodical is too often present. On the other hand, there are certain women who are of such retiring dispositions, and so averse to allowing the public to penetrate the veil which conceals the excessive tenderness of their mind, that no one but a husband or child is able to give us the clue to their actions or works. It may be asked what right has the public to inquire and attempt to penetrate into these secrets which are sacred to the family circle? And certainly were the case one of an ordinary biographical notice, the question would be a pertinent one. But there are circumstances in this case that are very distinct from ordinary memoirs, and the close intimacy and complete union of thoughts, in which "no shadow came between," gave the son the most intimate knowledge and discretion in these matters; a son or a daughter alone could have possessed this knowledge or exercised this power, and to our mind Mr. Wood has used it with great delicacy and judgment.

The *Athenæum* once said that Mrs. Henry Wood possessed the power of lifting the veil, which in real life separates man from man, in such a way, that the impression left is as though one had known certain people as intimately as it one had been their guardian angel. On reading these memoirs, one cannot help coming to the conclusion that this gift has been inherited by the son.

That the work before us should be enthusiastic is a necessary condition, for such a mother could not but evoke enthusiasm, and what son would not praise a parent who was in every walk of life so admirable?

When we open Mr. Wood's handsomely appointed book, the first thing which attracts the eye is the portrait of a lady with a singularly gentle face and a sweet expression, full of sensibility and sympathy, with an earnest and thoughtful gaze, as if the soul were looking at you through those mild eyes and inquiring, Have *you* also suffered, and do *you* need sympathy from one who has borne her lot with submission? We do not know whether this portrait is a good likeness of Mrs. Wood, but we should imagine it must be so, because, from having read her works, it is exactly the kind of face which we had pictured to ourselves, and which does not disappoint us when we see it. How rarely is this the case? Often, after reading some beautiful book or poem, we come across the portrait of the author, with a feeling of disappointment, because it does not realise the ideal which we had formed. In the case of Mrs. Henry Wood, however, her sweet and gentle face was certainly the index to a beautiful mind, and we like to look at her portrait while we are reading what she has written. It makes us wish to know more about her life, her character, training and surroundings, and this is certainly what a

portrait ought to do, when placed at the commencement of a book.

Of Mrs. Wood's character and views let her son speak—

"Few have equalled her in high ideals and fulfilled endeavours, and few have approached her in the unobtrusiveness of her ways." . . . "All her sympathy with joy and sorrow remained undiminished to the end," . . . "she possessed also what was perhaps the strongest and certainly the highest faculty within her, an eminently spiritual nature to which everything else was subservient. Devotion was her first duty; quiet, simple, and unobtrusive; never talked about, never paraded; for she ever felt that utterance made all feeling common-place, and the deepest subjects were too sacred for words." . . . "In the darkest

revelation has not laid open to our ken. She probably believed with a Kempis, "Blessed is that simplicity which leaveth the difficult ways of dispute, and goeth on in the plain and sure path of God's commandments."

Mrs. Henry Wood was born in the fine old city of Worcester in the memorable year of the great frost, 1814. Her childhood at first was spent with her grand-parents, who appear to have been people of considerable refinement and taste.

Even at the present day, as will be seen from the numerous illustrations in Mr. Wood's book, Worcester abounds in relics of antiquity. A noble Gothic cathedral with interesting old collegiate buildings, formerly the dwelling-places of the monks; numerous parish churches, streets where can still be seen houses with projecting storeys, bow windows, pointed gables, and black timber frame-work. An old bridge of many arches spans the fair Severn. But when Mrs. Wood was a child the evidences of antiquity were still more abundant. Mr. Wood tells us, and we see by her writings, that all these had a great influence upon Mrs. Wood's literary career; and we are told that as a child she used to sit in the choir of the cathedral gazing upon the curious old east window, "which had no special design, but was a kaleidoscope of ancient glass of many rich tints. Her gaze would often wander to this marvellous vision, attracted by the beauty of colouring; we do not know whether the window still remains or has given place to something modern and inferior,* sometimes it would be difficult to draw her away from the fascination. Service ended, the magnificent organ would roll its volume of sound through the roof and arches, and many of the congregation would pace the aisles whilst the player extended his voluntary beyond the utmost limits, and the bedesmen would wax impatient and think it hard that they should be kept from their Sunday dinner."

There is considerable interest attaching to this fact, because about this period Dr. Wesley, one of the most famous of all English church composers, frequently played the organ of Worcester Cathedral; he was nephew of the well-known founder of Methodism.

An accident which happened at about this time had a very serious influence on Mrs. Wood's future life. A somewhat too venturesome nurse crossed a field with her in which there was a bull who was known to be of a very savage disposition. The animal, attracted by the red hood of the child, made a rush at her. The nurse, though very much frightened, had sufficient presence of mind to throw the child over the hedge; although saved from what might have been a terrible death, there would appear to be reasons for supposing that the injury caused by the fall brought on in later life that illness which necessitated her spending so much of her time upon her couch of suffering. It is curious that an accident which had a very similar result befel Mrs. Barrett Browning. And possibly, in both

* This curious window was removed during the recent restoration of the Cathedral.



MRS. HENRY WOOD.

hour of life she was absolutely calm and serene, entirely trustful." "It is God's will, He doeth all things well." She rarely said these things, but she never ceased to act up to them."

We are also told that possessing a strong belief in the close union between the seen and the unseen world, she would never consent to join the "spiritualists," although pressed to do so by her intimate friends Mary Howitt and Mrs. Milner Gibson. "Her conception of things unseen was too deep and reverential to allow of their being lightly handled, and she could not reconcile these manifestations with her ideas of spirituality. In the unseen world she had absolute faith, and thought it probable that spirits were about us guarding and influencing our lives if we permitted them to do so. She believed in occasional and direct manifestations from Heaven, and thought it possible that dreams and visions were occasionally sent." In short she was a sincere Christian with a very spiritual mind, guided by the rules of revealed religion, but with no desire to penetrate unduly into those mysteries which

cases, the literary career may have been brought about by it.

After the death of her grandfather Mrs. Wood resided with her parents. And the similarity of tastes and interests between father and daughter led to their becoming very constant companions.

At this time the ports were opened for the importation of certain foreign goods free of duty. Mrs. Wood's father, who was a wholesale manufacturer of gloves, though not ruined like so many others, suffered considerably. The terrible state of things in Worcester is well described in *Mildred Arkell*, especially in the *powerfully-written chapter*, entitled "A City's Desolation."

With Mrs. Wood's marriage a thorough change in her life takes place. She is suddenly removed from all her English surroundings, separated from her English friends, and commences life on the Continent, and that not a portion of the Continent visited by her own countrymen, but to an Alpine region in far-away Dauphiné.

In describing the surroundings of her new home with her husband, Mr. Wood gives us one of those vivid and exquisite landscape scenes which he excels in portraying.

"The grounds were beautifully laid out and surrounded by lovely groves, where in the hottest summer days it was ever cool and shady, and life was full of charm; whispering pine-trees stood out vividly against the blue sky, and the air was always clear and exhilarating; terraces and grounds were adorned with statues, and the distant views were marvellous. They looked down upon a valley whence opened out a wide spreading plain, in the midst of which, like a silver thread, ran the far-famed river. The gleam of the sun was often reflected upon its waters, and now and then small craft would be seen passing to and fro. In the early morning all nature far and near would frequently be clothed in a purple haze. The colours of sunrise and sunset were often gorgeous and flaming; and in these, more than anything else, Mrs. Wood delighted. The mountain summits would catch the glow of departing day, and everything would change to rose colour, or deeper red, dying out in the growing twilight."

Mrs. Wood, in her beautiful new home, soon made many friends; and very delightful is the account given of the attachment of an ugly old market-woman, nicknamed by her husband "Old Venus." We refer to this because it is an example of the extraordinary influence which Mrs. Wood obtained over the people in every class of life, from the old French aristocracy, such as the Count and Madame de Marseine, down to the humblest peasant.

We cannot follow this interesting life through every stage, and must hurry on to the time when between the paroxysms of illness her first great novel, *East Lynne*, was written; "the author often wondered whether she should live to finish it, yet through all she was resigned and cheerful."

Up to this time Mrs. Henry Wood had published nothing except short stories in magazines. But the long and most enthusiastic review given by the *Times*, and echoed through the whole press, at once raised Mrs. Henry Wood to one of the highest positions in the literary world.

From this time forward her life was a remarkable alternation of sufferings bravely borne and indomitable literary industry, some forty "three-volume" novels and nearly three hundred short stories proceeded from her facile pen. The names and titles of these are too well-known to need recording.

The only break in this portion of her life was the death of her husband, which necessitated the return to her native land with her

children, and her residence at Norwood and subsequently at St. John's Wood, where she died at the age of seventy-three, from the complaint which had caused her so much suffering all through the latter years of her life. Her death is most touchingly described by her son; we refrain from quoting it, because it should be carefully read in connection with her life.

The last verse of the Bible which she read aloud to her children was from Rev. xxi., "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things have passed away."

It is truly edifying and refreshing to consider and reflect upon the life of a writer of fiction, such as that which we have faintly indicated. Here was one of the most popular authoresses that ever lived, deeply afflicted with suffering and by the loss of many who were dear to her, yet in the whole range of novels and stories which she produced we do not find the slightest tinge of pessimism, or the least indication of that spirit now so frequent in writers which questions the supreme right of the Almighty to do what He will with His creatures.

"What God hath done is rightly done," might be taken as the principle of her thoughts and actions, and of the teaching which is instilled, though never preached, in her stories. Mrs. Henry Wood had that wise instinct which taught her that preaching is not the province of the novelist, but that she must teach by the character and events which she describes. That abomination of the present day, the "psychological" novel, although it had appeared, was fortunately confined to the shelves of the bookseller, or carted off to the waste-paper dealer. The minds of human beings had not then succumbed to the pestilential influence and the sickening sentimentality of the pessimist, or the diseased imagination of the *fin-de-siècle* school.

In Mrs. Henry Wood's philosophy the creature submits to the design of the Creator, and does not try to prove that God has blundered in not creating a special world for the environment of that mass of conceit and vanity which the modern writer calls his "individuality."

The popularity of Mrs. Wood's novels was so great that in some of our colonies the sale exceeded even that of the works of Charles Dickens.

Nor does there seem any appearance of a wane in the demand for them, and it may not be uninteresting to try to discover what special gift or merit it is that has rendered them so attractive to all classes of society. That they are so there can be no manner of doubt; we meet with them amongst the most intellectual people, and amongst the humblest classes of society; they are in the drawing-room of the nobility, in the library of the student, in the parlour of the lodging-house and even in the kitchen. Now how is it that these books appeal to all these different classes, and charm them all? Some people have told us that her sketches of life are photographically true, others that she possesses the most extraordinary dramatic power, others again that her plots are so skilfully planned and carried out, others that the people she wrote about were described from those whom she knew so well. Now although no doubt all of these are true, they would not account for the most remarkable fact that they are equally interesting to the countess and the kitchen-maid.

We must look for the solution far deeper down than any literary or merely artistic excellence, or even than any purely intellectual gift. It is so very rare a thing that any work of art or literature should appeal to all classes alike, that the author of such work must possess some very special power, and we think we

can, in Mrs. Wood's case, see what it was, and we will endeavour to explain it.

It was the extraordinary power which she had of sympathy. It is by no means improbable that this power which was at first the passive amiability of a gentle and kindly disposition became, after suffering had exalted that nature, a strong, active, vigorous principle which demanded exercise.

The kind of lot which Mrs. Wood was called upon to bear in later life would chasten and exalt this noble gift of sympathy, which would show itself in a marked way in her writings.

There is a curious passage in a very old book upon patience which is very much to the point. "Good and virtuous men are like fresh flowers which the Gardiner, having newly gathered lest they should be scattered and wither, ties them together into a nosegay with so straight and hard a bond that if it were possible they would cry out and complain of the injury. But flowers thus compacted and set in water live long and flourish." This means of course that if it were not for the tight bond or painful restraint, such, for instance, as a sick bed or an incurable complaint, many beautiful natures would never become sufficiently concentrated to effect the noble work which God has intended that they should do, and just as the tight bond preserves these flowers from being lost or withering, so does the affliction combine and preserve the higher virtues of noble minds.

It has often struck us that Mrs. Wood might never have been the great novelist which she really was if she had been spared the suffering, because in that case she would never, in all probability, have been able to concentrate and perfect her extraordinary gift of sympathy. Probably it would, like the unbound flowers, have been spread about, and her mind would have gone into other channels of thought instead of being united in one. This gift of sympathy it is which gives such a reality to the joys and sorrows of her characters. We can well understand what her son tells us: that he had seen her weep with their sorrows, and laugh with their joys.

Thus they appeal strongly to the feelings of the reader in whatever position of life he or she may be, for sympathy is a bond which embraces all mankind, and when the reader is thoroughly impressed with this characteristic in Mrs. Wood's works, it is but a very small step to carry on that sympathy to himself.

The fact is, that the reader becomes one of her characters, so strongly is he identified with them in joy or sorrow, and consequently it appears to his mind that Mrs. Wood is sympathising with his personal sorrows or joys. This is apparent in several ways.

We remember once hearing a sick person say when reading a book of Mrs. Wood's—"How I should like to know the authoress, she would pity and console me so delightfully."

Mr. Wood tells us in his book that letters were frequently addressed to "Johnny Ludlow." In one case asking him to come and smoke a pipe and talk over old times. Of course it must be distinctly understood that the very power of expressing this sympathy shows literary ability of a very high order, just as when the painter conceives a magnificent picture, it is nothing without he has a sufficient amount of skill to embody it.

We cannot conclude this article without speaking of the high moral tone which pervades Mrs. Henry Wood's books, which is such a wholesome contrast to much of the literature unfortunately now popular.

Mrs. Wood is always religious though she rarely wrote with the distinct object of enforcing any particular religious truth, and with the single exception of *Danesbury House*, which was written for a temperance

society, she does not go out of her way to enlarge upon crime. She of course never falls into the detestable practice now so common of very minutely describing the vice against which the author pretends that he is cautioning the public:—

“The fashion of the day it is to paint
In lurid colours violent and strong

The sins of men and women and the
wrong
That is their own; and with this foul-
some taint
By precept our own little ones acquaint.”

In Mrs. Wood's stories of course, as in the world itself, we see the good and bad together, and we see that vice brings about its own

punishment though it may triumph for a time.

In the end virtue is either triumphant, or a terrible catastrophe is brought about by neglecting or despising its laws. Providence never deserts the good, and the old lesson is always insisted upon that—

“From a pure heart proceeds the fruit of a good life.”
H. W. B.

And those unfortunate chimies have nearly passed out of memory with the lapse of years. The "Silent Chimies" they are always called when, by chance, allusion is made to them, and will be so called for ever.

Johnny Ludlow.

(THESE ARE THE LAST LINES MRS. HENRY WOOD EVER WROTE.)

MARSH MARIGOLDS.

By ADA M. TROTTER, Author of "My Lady Marjorie," etc.

CHAPTER XXI.

FRANK PAYS A VISIT TO "TRELAWNEY HOUSE."

IT was now arranged that when the usual party met at Cousin Rufus's for Hallowe'en, Marion should return to the "Old Moss Farm" for a short time. Mrs. Trelawney wrote that the child was working intensely, that Bob Lowe seemed to forget utterly that she was only a young creature, and that he was absolutely enraptured with her progress (which Mrs. Trelawney considered phenomenal), and had planned a most arduous course of study for her. "Therefore," added Mrs. Trelawney, "as the dear child is growing too much absorbed in her work, and learning quite too fast, conditions I do not approve of, I shall send her back to you until after Christmas. Try and give her perfect change of occupation, let her learn lessons of old Molly in the kitchen, or turn farmer with Ruth; believe me, she will do even better after such a period of vegetation than if we permitted her to press on as she is now doing. For Bob Lowe to express the opinion that she is a 'good student' means in reality that she is an intense worker, and though I know that a laborious road is the only way open to success in art, I want to keep in mind that youth only comes once, that there are other things to live for besides art, and that health is above and beyond all important to happiness. So, as I find the student spirit growing too fast for even my merry Ellie to weight the scales, I shall send your child back to you for the interval between Hallowe'en and Christmas."

Neither Bob Lowe nor Marion knew of this wise dispensation, but the former

was quite gratified to find Mrs. Trelawney ceased to combat his views with regard to his pupil, little thinking that she had resolved upon this masterly stroke for Marion's welfare.

Marion had learned how to see; and in so doing had gained a kind of respect even for common pots and pans (contempt for which had in her early lessons brought to her many a sorry half hour). But still she did not realise how much she had gained under her exigent teacher. She was too apt to become depressed about her work, and too eager to make visible progress, faults very common to youth.

Unlike the rest of the young people, she had become sincerely attached to the mysterious Count; and had dared to pretermit the objectionable name "Bob Lowe," substituting in its place the Italian "Maestro." Ethel had said to her uncle, "If I could only believe in you, how I could love you!" Marion did believe in him as one of the noblest, grandest of souls, and she conceived a respectful affection for him which she never had cause to exchange for a less warm feeling. She dared too, timid though she might be with ordinary people, to talk with this enigma, and ask questions with the freedom she would have used with her own father. For his part Bob Lowe was blissfully happy; he had his ideal student, and he began to delight in her affectionate faith in him as much as he had done from the first in her delicate beauty.

"Maestro," said Marion, one day, frowning severely at a sketch she had made of some garden tools, which simple though they might look in common every-day use, were piled before this

would-be artist in a most aggravating manner. "Maestro, what a dull person I must be to bungle so over a common rake. I wonder you do not tell me to go. I often feel as though I had really not got on one bit, notwithstanding all your patience and goodness to me."

Bob Lowe left his "creation" and came to his pupil's side.

"Ah, this is lazy work," was his criticism, "you have not taken the trouble to see; take your time; begin again. When you think you have seen all there is to see in the group, make your sketch. You do not like doing common every-day objects, Marion; something beautiful would be worth your best efforts, you think, not this uninteresting heap of tools."

Marion coloured but did as she was bid. Presently however she began again.

"Have I improved, Maestro?" she said.

He laughed, an amused little laugh. Then he opened a cabinet drawer, and took forth a sketch-book.

"You shall be your own judge," said he. "Let us look over the old work of which you were so proud. Come! your foreshortening of the rake is now correct; you may leave your work for the few minutes which will suffice to make you aware of your position to-day, as compared with your old stand-point."

Marion took a seat beside him, and without a word, he opened the book and showed her the immature efforts of undirected genius.

"Oh!" cried Marion, turning her eyes away from her *chef-d'œuvre*, the old Abbey. "Did I do that? How horrible! I thought my picture was just like the