A TWENTIETH CENTURY IDEAL.

The death of du Maurier has not been followed by the critical study of his literary character and methods that one would naturally expect. A reason for this may be found in the fact that his latest work is still passing through the press in serial form, and the critic may well hesitate to pronounce judgement on a life-work that is not yet complete. Enough has been published of "The Martian" however, to show that it is, like its predecessors, the story of an English life with a French, essentially Gallic, environment.

Much of the author's charm derives from this setting, and the spontaniety of its interpretation completes it, but du Maurier was essentially a writer of men's novels, despite his popularity among the other sex. He gave his best thought and best work to the deliniation of masculine character. His women are men's women, and the masculine element dominates

even their estimate of themselves. This is noticibly true of Trilby, the really startling feature of whose character seems to have been quite obscured, to the public mind, by the pathetic incidents in connection with the hypnotic maestro. She is an altogether exceptional type in fiction. Her peculiarity consists in that she is the only woman ever attempted by a novelist who is wholly devoid of the sense of chastity as an essential or even a desirable attribute!

Every conceivable phase of personal purity has been made the subject of fictitious narrative: as an instinctive virtue it has been exalted both by its observance under sore temptation and by the woes which follow its violation, but a woman without any conception of chastity either for herself or another, is an absolutely new ideal,--at least, in any civilized country. This is just what Trilby is, and what the author proclaimed her to be. Speaking of her introductority but by no means apologetically he said:

" My poor heroine had all the virtues but one; but the virtue she lacked (the very one of all that plays the title role)was of such a kind that I have found it impossible so to tell her history as to make it quite fit and proper reading for the ubiquitous young person so dear to us all. She followed love for love's sake only, capriciously,desultorily,more in a frolicsome spirit of camaraderie than anything else."

The boldness of the conception is equalled only by the audacity of its justification. The promise of the introduction was carried out to the letter. The sneer against the "ubiquitous young person" was made good in every chapter of the wonderful book. The heroine is depicted not only as a woman of great frankness, but who never developed any sense of chastity. She was, as the author aptly says, like an amateur, too proud to sell her favor, but freely bestowing it on any admiring friend of the moment's fancy. She ran away from Little Billee not from any sense of imperfection

or regret for her past, but because she saw that continued association with her was hurtful to his prospects in life.

This story, and indeed, du Maurier's literary life, is remarkable chiefly because it has given us an entirely a wholly new ideal, a fresh type. Fortunately for the general conception of womanhood, it can hardly be admitted as a true one. It may be doubted whether, in any quite civilized community a girl, no matter how hopeless her surroundings, can grow to maturity without some vague realization of the "title virtue", its desirability, or the humiliation attendant upon its loss. That one could, is an idea original with du Maurier, invented as an excuse for his heroine, which he had the genius to avow before any critic had opportunity to discover or formulate it.

More wonderful still, is the fact that the excuse was accepted as sufficient, as condoning the wholesale assault on what has ever been considered as the most essential of female characteristics. The very gist of the novel's significance is that unconsciousness of evil is the equiva-

lent of virtue. To say that such a book would not have been tolerated a quarter of a century ago but weakly expresses the contrast between the past and present feminine ideal. Today it was not only tolerated, but published serially in a magazine admittedly of the highest class. It went thus into hundreds of thousands of homes, and in bookform was the success of the decade. That it was possible shows how truly the "New Woman" deserves her name. She not merely reads, but reads with critical acumen, what her good mother regards with honest abhorrence.

The literary product of late, of both men and women, touching the tendency of female development, inclines toward the same ideal, making personal purity an incident of secondary and individual import, rather than an essential attribute, indespensible to the well-being of society. From a moral, and sociological, point of view, the change is astounding and ominous. Individually, some woes may be softened, some wrongs mitigated,

some temptations relieved; collectively, a tolerance will be inspired for offences against a moral code already admittedly one-sided in its operation. But whatever the ultimate result, the general interest shown in the fictitious personage who is the best-known exponent of the idea, the open and frank speculation concerning it, emphasises the tremendous distance between the womanhood of today and a generation ago. If we go on at the same rate, Heaven preserve us from the Twentieth Century ideal!

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