

It would be a great and rare experience if any one month in a year could furnish a group of books all of which offered such interesting problems of construction as those we have been discussing. But the average every-day novel is in this respect sadly conventional. An exception is afforded this month by Dolf Wyllarde's latest novel, *The Riding Master*. Here is a book which, without the obscurity of Henry James, belongs quite distinctly in the same class with *What Maisie Knew*—that is to say, as regards its structural method. The Riding Master of the title is the head of a fashionable London riding-school; and it happens that there come to him, among his other pupils, a certain little group of men and women and children whose lives form a curious series of interlacing triangles. There are many irregularities in the lives of these representatives of high-life English society; some of them are moving over the thin ice of respectability; some have already experienced the unpleasantness of finding the ice cracking beneath them. Their encounters at the riding-school are often startling, dramatic, keenly embarrassing. But all this does not concern the Riding Master. Irregularities of his pupils' lives are not a part of his day's work. He simply looks on, impassive, inscrutable, fulfilling with inexhaustible patience his office of instructor; going round and round, hour after hour, day by day, the cramped circuit of the riding-school; and teaching tirelessly, ceaselessly, both the horses and the riders. He is an interesting figure, this Riding Master; a clean-cut, clean-minded young fellow of the British middle class, precociously grave and mature with a singleness of purpose that would make it impossible for anything smaller than an earthquake or a tidal wave to turn his attention from the droop of a pupil's shoulders or a faulty grip on the reins. If Dolf Wyllarde were a writer of bigger calibre, she would have seen her way to writing this story wholly within the confines of the riding-school; she would have limited our knowledge of events to such as passed immediately beneath the eyes of the Riding Master in the midst of all that harmony of soft browns—the brown of the

tan-bark mellowed by patches of golden sunlight; the brown of the encircling panelling of ancient wood, the brown of the sleek horses whose training one realises was always a keener pleasure than the training of his human pupils. Dolf Wyllarde was unable to do the story in this bigger way—or at least she did not choose to do so. She takes us out of the school time and again, following in the wake of her other characters and giving us the key to situations over which we might otherwise have groped and puzzled helplessly. But this does not alter the fact that the Riding Master is the hero of the book. It is not merely a question how much the Riding Master knows and what he thinks of the little world around him. He is the unit of measurement by which we are allowed to gauge the sordidness, the unworthiness, the unspeakable folly of the men and women who regard him as little better than a paid attendant and whom he would have such good cause to despise.