PETER IBBETSON.*

THE compelling charm of the art of Mr. Du Maurier's drawings is explained by this romance, the verbal expression of his talent. If the quality of genius were definable, if its identity, even, had not been recently denied by one of the leading novelists, it would be pleasant and fitting to attribute genius to Mr. Du Maurier. For an artistic power like his requires a rare word for its name. Imagination is its essence; the sense of beauty and graceful and distinct expression give it embodiment.

In reading this story we recognize the heroine, Mary, Duchess of Towers, as the ideal from which Mr. Du Maurier has drawn those beautiful, aristocratic women, tall and fair like lilies, who walk proudly through his sketches of London society, past Mr. Ponsonby de Tomkins and the Man who Would have Wished to have Said it Otherwise, or him who blundered out the Things one would willingly have Left Unsaid, or the rest of us poor mortals who make so mean a show, abashed by these daughters of the gods. Brilliant, beautiful—a thorough but unspoiled *mondaine*, retaining the heart of a Juliet until death at more than a half-century — Mary Seraskier is a woman to adore. So much may be said in recognition of the pleasure of better acquaintance with this feminine type which hitherto has moved silent or, at most, speaking a few lines of slight epigram, across Du Maurier's cartoons.

The scheme of the novel is singular, exacting, and fanciful. It is, in brief, the autobiography (Mr. Du Maurier maintains the dramatic impersonation by professing to edit these documents) of a man who is condemned to imprisonment during life for having killed, in a struggle, the man who insulted the memory of his dead mother and of another virtuous woman. To him there is given a consolation, wonderful and complete. In his early years, passed in a delightful French town, the prisoner had had a little playmate, Mimsey; with her he invented dear little dialects all their own, of Anglicized French and Gallicized English; they enacted the fantastic dramas of fairies and enchanted princes and princesses — really no more marvelous to children than the grandiose magic of the actual world, of which every experience is for them a new fairy tale. The chosen haunt of the little Mimsey and Gogo was a large deserted park, a perfect paradise for childhood:

> A very wilderness of delight, a heaven, a terror of tangled thickets and not too dangerous chalk cliffs, disused old quarries and dark caverns, prairies of lush grass, sedgy pools . . . an Eden where one might gather and eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge without fear, and learn lovingly the ways of life without losing one's innocence; a forest that had remade for itself a new virginity, and become primeval once more.

The refined charm of the little circle, composed of the families of Mimsey and Gogo, the half French, half English life, are described with a tenderness and spirit that mark them as partly, at least, reminiscent. The aptness and flexibility, also, of equal acquaintance with two mother-tongues are noticeable throughout Mr. Du Maurier's novel. The little boy, orphaned, is taken to England by his uncle Ibbetson; from Pierre Pasquier de la Marière, alias M. Gogo, that he was, he becomes plain Peter Ibbetson. This uncle's cruelty and vulgarity poison the peace of the boy's life, and his foul boasting maddens the young man to kill him.

Up to the day of imprisonment Peter has seen only once the little Mimsey, grown into a superb woman, married to a worthless duke. But from childhood dreams have played a singular part in the hero's existence; and it is in dreams that he meets Mary, widowed, and all his own. The laws of dreams in these colloquies are defined with a curious perception and precision by Mr. Du Maurier; his touch is so firm and light that one forgets how diaphanous a stuff it is that dreams are made of, and he employs as his canvas. Indeed, so vivid are the visions of the prisoner, that less real to him and to the reader appear the actual visits which the Duchess makes, in company with other benevolent persons, than these rendezvous of the spirit set free by sleep. After the death of Mary, which so turns the brain of her lover that he is removed from the prison to the asylum, she returns seven times from the regions of space to comfort the forlorn man. Of the mysteries revealed by her, his waking moments recall only the simple and veracious saying of hers: "All will be well for us all, and of such a kind that all who do not sigh for the moon will be well content."

Naturally, this romance of Mr. Du Maurier's will suggest comparison with Balzac's *Seraphita* and Gautier's *Spirite*. These parallels we leave to others. But there is a human warmth, gayety, even occasionally a touch of comedy, in this singularly spiritual story which has

> . . . made
> The bar it leaned on warm.

Mr. Du Maurier has saved his novel from esoteric vagueness and from announcement of psychical theories, and has kept it everywhere brilliant, vivid, and energetic, by remembering that his task is a novel, not a speculative treatise, and by refusing to take his thesis too seriously. *Peter Ibbetson* is a story as uncommon as it is suggestive.

* Peter Ibbetson. Edited and Illustrated by George Du Maurier. Harper & Brothers. $1.50.