

Mme. Bazan's "Wedding-Trip" *

THE NAME of Emilia Pardo Bazan is already familiar to us through 'A Christian Woman.' 'A Wedding-Trip' bears trace of the same hand and has touches of the same inspiration and insight. The central figure, as before, is a woman, and the moral intention of the book is worked out along her lines of thought and feeling. But as a whole the story is disappointing. It is an episode rather than a novel, and offers no actual solution or dénouement. The plot is of the simplest. A newly-married but somewhat ill-assorted pair start on their wedding-trip. The groom descends at one of the stations and is left behind by the train. The bride, forced to proceed on her journey alone, makes the acquaintance of a stranger, who inevitably proves more interesting than the husband. The jealousy of the latter is aroused, and the young wife finally returns, alone and broken-hearted, to her father's home. Meagre as is the plot, it is overcharged with detail and description, and the incidents seem forced and extravagant. The leading idea of the book is the saving power of faith, and its ultimate conquest

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over the doubts and despair of materialism—a conclusion, however, to which Mme. Bazan gives forcible and dramatic statement rather than logical and convincing demonstration. There are striking and suggestive passages.

‘Do you indeed believe in nothing?—in nothing?’ she asks. * * * ‘I believe in evil,’ he answers. ‘In evil, that surrounds and envelops us on all sides from the cradle to the grave; that never leaves us; in evil, that makes of the earth a vast battle-field where no being can live but by the death and the suffering of other beings; in evil, which is the pivot on which the world turns and the very mainspring of life.’ ‘It would seem then, according to what you say, that you pay to the devil the worship you refuse to God.’ ‘Worship? no! Shall I worship the iniquitous power, that, concealed in darkness, works for the general woe? To fight, to fight against it is what I desire, now and always. You call this power the devil: I call it evil, universal suffering. I know how alone it may be vanquished.’ ‘By faith and good works,’ exclaimed the young girl. ‘By dying,’ he answered.

And again, when he is tempting her to fly with him, he asks her for whose sake she resists. ‘For God’s sake,’ she answers. ‘But your God is angry with you,’ he urges; ‘you offended Him by loving me; you offended Him by continuing to love me; by coming here you have offended Him still more deeply.’ ‘Though I stood on the brink of perdition, though I were sinking in the flames of hell, my God is ready to save and to pardon me, if my will be turned to Him. Now, now, I will ask Him to save me.’ We are carried by the passion and glow, but we realize that the true difficulty has not been met. Mme. Bazan does not give us the key to this invincible faith; she does not put us into possession of that spiritual kingdom where the powers of darkness cannot prevail. But in spite of defects, she is a writer of rare and strong individuality. Spanish to the core, with traditions and prejudices born into the blood and an environment and conditions to which we are not accustomed, it requires, on our part, something of a mental and even moral effort at times to sympathize, or thoroughly to understand her point of view. Her real genius seems to consist in a certain revelation of soul—a certain spiritual growth and fulfilling in circumstances where we should least look for it. She has a masculine grasp of life, but, at the same time, it is the feminine side that triumphantly asserts itself, the woman’s nature that is always justified. Whether or not Mme. Bazan will ever be popular with an American public is an open question, but what would greatly add to her influence and lasting fame would be a better standard of taste, and more artistic perception and reserve.