THE HOUSE AT HIGH BRIDGE.*

THIS, we should say, is the largest work which Mr. Fawcett has yet essayed in fiction. It is cubical, whereas some of his writings under this head have had perhaps only two dimensions. *The House at High Bridge* may be called a New York novel, inasmuch as High Bridge, so-called, is an appurtenance of New York, and the people who inhabit this house are of the New York world, though living on the outskirts of the city. It may also be called a literary novel, inasmuch as the center of its situation is a literary point, and its descriptive passages and dialogue involve remarks upon literary products and methods. Mr. Fawcett makes the thread of his story a line on which to hang out his views on the morals and the art of literature, and, covertly, on the motives, means, and successes, of the literary set of the present day and especially of our own land. No names are mentioned, but in pages like these one can easily read between the lines, even if not meant to do so. We do not mean that the book has furtive purposes, that it backbites or caricatures other work on parallel lines, that it is captious or censorious. It is not that. At the same time it is critical, yet its critical remarks are asides, and do not obstruct the main current of events.

The House at High Bridge is the home of the Coggeshal family, father, mother, and two daughters, Isabel and Sadie. The members of this household are well differentiated and individualized. Mr. Coggeshal is an author, a novelist, who has slowly climbed the ladder of effort and has just

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now seemingly reached the rung of fame; a preoccupied, silent, abstracted man, living in his library, and somewhat and strangely lifeless and cold under the great popular success of his latest book, "Rachel Rand." Mrs. Coggeshal is an inconsequential woman, of many and rapid words and few and vapid ideas, "off color" in what she wears and in much that she says and does. Sadie, with her lover, is a chip off the maternal block. Isabel is the beauty and the character of the household.

And what is the trouble in the House at High Bridge? It is that Mr. Coggeshal is a literary felon, bearing on his conscience the secret of a disgraceful deed. "Rachel Rand," though published under his name, is not his work, and his honors as its reputed author have been fraudulently won. The MS. of the book was found in the possession of an imbecile neighbor, Mr. Chadwick, and its acquisition by Coggeshal and publication as his own was the result of a nefarious bargain between him and one Carolan, an unscrupulous Irishman in intimate relations with Chadwick.

Such being the unpleasant situation, of whose particulars Coggeshal's wife and daughters of course know nothing, Carolan takes cunning advantage of it to put his foot forward as suitor for Isabel, and this complication having set in, who should turn up but a Mr. Brockholst, Mr. Chadwick's nephew, the real author of the MS. which has been published to Coggeshal's credit under the changed title of "Rachel Rand," and Brockholst too enters the lists for Isabel's favor.

The problem then is for Coggeshal to conceal his theft, for Brockholst to be prevented from recognizing the identity of "Rachel Rand," for Carolan to be kept quiet, and yet for Isabel to be conveyed over to the proper lover, who of course is Brockholst. This problem, ingeniously contrived, is as ingeniously solved.

The *motif* of the story seems hardly commensurate with its framework, and throughout the book we are conscious of Mr. Fawcett's style. It is not a transparent style. His selection of words and his structure of sentences at times detain attention. As a literary composition this is the fault of the book; its tendency to patent artifices in phrase and syntax. The merits of the story are brains, knowledge of human nature, precision and force in description, and skill in characterization. Mrs. Bondurant, for example, is forcibly drawn. She is a sample of a class of women unfortunately numerous. Mr. Fawcett has few superiors in unveiling these certain types in city society. He knows them and he is merciless.

The House at High Bridge has been written with carefulness; much of it, probably, worked over and over. It has a degree of freshness which many novels have not. It has not the sparkle of ripples in the sunshine, but rather the polish of a massive piece of furniture well rubbed down. It has the temperate heat of talent rather than the fervid glow of genius, but impresses one as being the product of substantial abilities. Occasionally it strikes fire, and throughout moves on an elevated plane of thought and feeling. Mr. Coggeshal's case awakens the sympathy we always feel for an unfortunate man, and Mr. Brockholst and his Isabel deserve as they receive the reader's congratulations.