"Barbara Rebell"

Whether judged as a portrayal of the intricate reticulations of social life or simply as a history of individual lives, *Barbara Rebell*, by Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes, gives the impression of having been constructed with a care and a broad worldly knowledge which should have produced a book that would really count. For this reason the present opinion is probably not quite adequate. It is an axiom of all fair criticism that the first essential step is to determine what an author has tried to do, and in this particular case the reviewer frankly confesses that he has been unable to do so. Very possibly this is largely the reviewer's fault. The book is of the class of novels which begin with the heroine's infancy and work their way up by leaps and bounds. We first meet Barbara Rebell on her tenth birthday, domiciled in France, and leading rather a joyless and isolated life. Her family connections from first to last all seem to have the inconvenient faculty of getting themselves under a cloud. Her father, Richard Rebell, has been driven out of England by the generally credited report that he had cheated at cards; his cousin, Mme. Sampiero, Barbara's godmother, is separated from her husband and living openly with another man, Lord Bosworth. Just why we are introduced to all this irregularity and social ostracism in Barbara's childhood, excepting to explain how she acquired a Continental education and a good knowledge of French, is one of the things about the book's construction that are hard to understand. She certainly does not learn in the school of adversity how to order her own life wisely, for when we meet her again, a dozen years later, she has made the same blunder her godmother made before her, married the wrong sort of man, and is glad to separate from him and come home to England, where her godmother, now old and paralysed, is the only surviving relative to receive her and give her a home. Barbara the woman is a much more interesting personality than Barbara the child; indeed, she has character and temperament and a good deal else, and quite convinces us she is the sort of person who would attract to her the love and loyalty of numerous men, just as the author tells us that she does. The men, however, are not interesting—not even James Berwick, the son of her godmother's lover, Lord Bosworth, and we find it hard to believe that she really brought herself to the point of eloping to France with Berwick exactly as Mme. Sampiero years before eloped to France with Berwick's father. But even this is easier to believe than the sequel. It turns out that the elopement is not "consummated," to paraphrase a familiar legal expression. At this point in the story the reviewer began to rack his memory for some other novel of recent years in which an elopement across the channel was frustrated *in transitu*. It was—what was it?—

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why, of course, *Lady Rose's Daughter!* And with the tardy memory of that book came an awakening light upon the general character of *Barbara Rebell.* Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes belongs to the school of Mrs. Humphry Ward; she has in a milder degree many of the qualities and the faults of the author of *Robert Elsmere.* She may have a less profound knowledge of human nature, but on the whole she can be read with less mental fatigue.

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