MME. DURAND'S LUCIE RODEY.*

WHEN the student of literature observes the great rôle which Paris plays in modern fiction, he is not at loss to comprehend the excessive "nationality" of French art; the provinces are ignored, and everything — language, fashion, politics, learning, philosophy — take their rise from that inexhaustible fountain; a fountain, let us hasten to add, whose waters do not run crystal pure, but which are tinged, often transfigured, by froth and filth. Even Mme. Durand has forsaken Russia, where she won her first laurels; and has wheeled into line with the innumerable writers who find material for their work in kaleidoscopic glimpses at that most varied and fascinating of all themes — Parisian society.

The problem she undertakes to solve in *Lucie Rodey* is this: given a man and woman of sympathetic tastes and true nobility of character; unite them, the one with a husband, the other with a wife, diametrically opposite in feeling and sentiment; as frivolous and gay as their companions are noble; throw these four people into intimate companionship, surrounded by the enervating influences of French social customs, and what will be the result? If any fault is to be found with the work, it must be in the selection of the problem, not in the solution.

Lucie, the heroine, has been educated by her mother, Mme. Béruel, in a manner which modern society is pleased to call "old fashioned." She has been taught that the chief end of life is not to dress extravagantly and make conquests, but to form a pleasant home and to love her husband "enough to endure with him the sorrows of life; to be glad in his happiness, sad in his sorrow; to console and support him in weakness; to endure his anger, even his injustice, without abating her esteem." Add to this a sober mind and an innocence due to seclusion from the world, and we have the outline of Lucie's character. What wonder, then, that this young girl, with all her romantic ideas in regard to love and matrimony, should succumb to the charms of gay Max Rodey, the latest disciple of the *jeunesses dorées?* It is at the marriage of his cousin, Georges Varin, that Max first admires her beauty and innocence, and reminds himself that he is already past thirty and that it is time he should marry. A week later he asks for Lucie's hand. Mme. Béruel, regretting the overthrow of her hopes, which were set upon finding for her daughter a husband worthy of a serious woman's love, consults with several old

* Lucie Rodey. Par Henry Gréville. Paris: E. Plon & Cie. Boston: C. Schönhof.

friends, is assured that Max, having "sown his wild oats," now longs for the peaceful seclusion of the fireside, and at length gives her consent, — persuaded, not convinced.

Lucie's troubles begin with the day of her marriage. Max finds his cousin Berthe more agreeable company even at the wedding reception. These two at once discover sympathetic traits, and, equally versed in the elegant *argot* of the Parisian *salons*, become immediately like old friends. For all this badinage, however, it is evident that Max loves his wife sincerely — for the moment — only he finds her *un peu froid* in society, and sees no reason why he should carry into public the thousand tendernesses of the devoted swain. With this first night, then, Lucie finds her dreams of happiness rudely shattered; there is nothing for it but to be patient and endure. As for Max, his old habits, thrust momentarily into the background, once more reassert themselves. His wife is not gay; he would rather go to the club.

Georges Varin early realizes that *his* marriage is a marriage of *convenance*, and wisely determines to make the best of it. He leaves Berthe as much to herself as possible, but witnesses with regret the gradual alienation of Max from his newly-wedded wife. It is with the view of making her solitude less tedious that he goes to visit her. His pity is soon transformed into a warm admiration for her many noble qualities; an admiration which would require little fostering to ripen into something more enduring and less praiseworthy. When Mme. Béruel suggests that his frequent visits may excite remark, he determines, solely for Lucie's sake, to see her as little as possible. From this time a sort of Platonic affection grows up between them; they know how well suited they are to one another, but they also realize that the barrier between them must not be overleaped.

Max is troubled with no such scruples. His life becomes more and more disreputable. Lucie knows, but pardons, not without a struggle. This Lucie Rodey's character is difficult to outline in a brief space. She is a woman of pronounced opinions, yet easily influenced by those whom she has loved and trusted. This was a part of her education. She has not one impulsive trait in the ordinary course of every-day life, but in an emergency she acts without consideration. Mme. Durand has succeeded admirably in portraying this contradictory mind with a few simple touches. There is a scene when Max has been brought home wounded in a duel with Georges Varin, who had discovered his relations with Berthe. Lucie had learned her feeling toward Georges and had kept it in abeyance so far as possible. Now that this unfaithful husband lay insensible before her, she could not refrain from thinking how much better it would be if he should die. Of what use his life to himself? Was he not rather a curse to those who were most closely allied with him, to herself, above all to little Renée, her daughter?

The clock struck; it was the hour for his medicine. Lucie moved mechanically toward the mantel and took down the flask to measure the dose. This flask was of special interest because it was necessary to guard carefully against mistakes; the doctor had recommended her to attend personally to administering its contents; it was an active and powerful poison; in careless hands the danger would be great. An idea flashed through the young woman's brain; she approached the bed and steadfastly regarded Max Rodey, whose sleep was somewhat troubled, and who began to toss uneasily upon the pillows. If this faithless husband and disloyal friend were to die, Lucie would be free; she might go away with her daughter into some quiet place and forget her sorrows in solitude. A vision of gurgling streams, green trees, and sun-lit meadows passed before her eyes; beneath these trees a man, Georges, came toward her with a smile upon his lips. Free from Berthe, repudiated, driven from his friends, he too was at liberty; they walked side by side along the banks of the stream — Max dead, what mattered the rest? There would be nothing to keep them apart — nothing. Lucie looked at the flask and thought that by pouring out a drop or two too much, she would be free. Her tortured spirit, weighed down with humiliation, cried out for liberty. She placed her hand slowly upon the cork and remained motionless. "Drink!" murmured Max feebly, without opening his eyes, but turning instinctively toward her. She poured a little water into a goblet. Liberty — liberty for what? To see Georges without restriction. She trembled and placed the flask upon the table. She loved Varin! Yes, she loved him, not as she had loved Max in the innocent candor of young girlhood, but with the conscious, intelligent love of a woman who had suffered and who had broken the false idol of her youth. It was to love Georges without let or hindrance that she desired the death of Max, and the adulterer was seen by her for the first time in all his vileness with crime and remorse for his companions. "Drink," repeated Max with the impatience of a sick child. "In a moment," she said, in hollow tones, which seemed to her as if they came from the tomb. She took the flask; her hands trembled; she set it down, and went to wash her hands in cool water; then she came back, this time with an air of determination, and dropped the liquid into the goblet. One, two, three — she quickly raised the phial, closed it carefully and presented the healing potion to her husband. The last sensation of joy vanished with this dream, shattered under the stroke of conscience.

Max recovers, but the utter weakness of his character becomes more and more striking. The constant reiteration of his respect for Lucie is irritating. At length he goes away with Berthe; and Georges and Lucie are placed once more on the old footing of tender friendship. In the end, Berthe dies; Max returns to his outraged wife, broken in body and spirit. He is treated as an invalid guest; finally he goes away to America "to build up his fortune." The last we see of the remaining characters is the following glimpse:

Lucie is still young, and notwithstanding that her hair is streaked with gray she is more beautiful than ever. Georges is white-headed. One winter's night, Renée, seated on his knees, calls him "grandpapa;" and the two old friends glance at one another with a melancholy smile — from that day Georges Varin is always known to Renée as grandpapa, thus making him as it were, one of the family.

Two lives utterly wrecked and the other two sadly storm-tossed; that is the solution of our problem. It is easy to see Mme. Durand's purpose. *Lucie Rodey* is a stern and eloquent protest against the marriage laws and customs of France, and above all against the *marriage de convenance*. One can not turn its pages without a feeling of disgust that among civilized people women should be bought and sold like so much merchandise, or a man measure the value of his wife by her *dot*. The story has much merit aside from these considerations. Mme. Durand's style has a perfect simplicity which is not without brilliancy. Reading *Lucie Rodey* in conjunction with Mr. James's *Confidence* we are impressed with a certain similarity of treatment. There is the same absence of scenic effects. The drama is played in the full glare of the foot-lights; the background is altogether lost sight of. In each the interest is concentrated upon three or four *dramatis personæ*. Mme. Durand does not, however, follow Mr. James in his acute psychological analysis; she allows her characters to act more for themselves; hence the similarity is perhaps more apparent than real; more in methods than results.

We do not propose to enter here into the vexed question of "art for art." Suffice it to say that there is nothing objectionable in *Lucie Rodey* save so far as may pertain to the author's purpose, which cannot be esteemed other than praiseworthy. We are of opinion, however, that Mme. Durand has not displayed her full power in this work; it will neither increase nor diminish her reputation as a writer of fiction.