

People Talked About

Marie Corelli.

In a recent "Pall Mall Magazine" Herbert Vivian has a long article on Marie Corelli, which gives some interesting particulars about the authoress of "God's Good Man" in her own home. We make some extracts from the article, which is an account of a visit to Miss Corelli at Stratford-on-Avon:—

Miss Corelli is a very effective talker. She possesses a fine flow of language, eloquent imagery, an infectious sense of humour. When she laughs, it is with her whole face; when she discourses most seriously, she emphasises her philosophy or her criticisms with a few incisive gestures, each as telling as Lord Burleigh's nod. Her strong, small hands would alone suffice to express her thoughts with convincing grace.

She passed through glass doors, sweeping her long train like a tragedy queen. "Do you like old things?" she began. "You can see what an old house this is. It dates back beyond

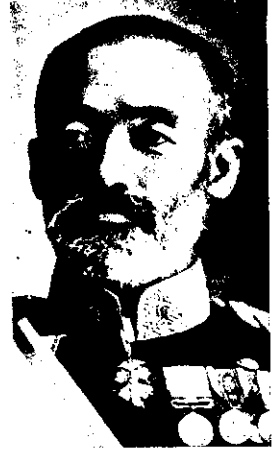
Elizabethan times. When I bought it what a state of dilapidation I found! This winter garden was only a bicycle shed. Look up there: a wretched builder cut off one of the gables to make room for the roof of the next house. Do you know much about trees? That ilex is supposed to be one of the finest in the country. Isn't its colour deliciously soothing? I prefer it to olive trees, which are too mournful and always remind me of churchyards. There is my little summer house, where I do some of my work. You can run up and look, if you like." I ascended a steep flight of steps and entered an inspiring bower, where a bust of Shakespeare caught my eye. Through the open windows I perceived a wealth of greenery, the fragrance of many flowers, and the buzzing of innumerable bees.

A serious mood stole over her as she sat before me. For some seconds she wrapped herself in thought. Then she raised her eyes in an attitude of invocation. "Literature," she exclaimed,

in the tones of a devout lover. "What a noble ideal! What a divine gift! Yet how miserably men and women neglect it! How ignorant they are of the very threshold of that delectable domain! Ask the ordinary people you meet even about Shakespeare, and you will find that they cannot tell you the names of half his plays or recognise any save the most hackneyed quotations."

Vivian: "May that not be largely due to the weakness of their memories?" Miss Corelli: "No, it is due to what Dr. Johnson summed up as 'ignorance, madam, pure ignorance.' Nor do I admit that a bad memory is an excuse. Every one can have a good memory if he will only take the trouble to cultivate it. What a wonderful gift is memory! I have only to shut my eyes, and I can conjure up pictures of any incident in my life, of any scene which I have ever beheld. Now I can see my old doll's house at home, I can see where one of the windows is cracked, I can see the pink paint on the door, I can tell all the dolls' by the names I

gave them long ago. What is that inner eye, which all of us possess? The ordinary retina is wonderful enough, with all the bright particular pictures it gives of the beauties around us. But



GENERAL BARON NOGAI.

The skilful strategist in command of the army that invested Port Arthur.



GENERAL STOESSEL,

Hero of the defence of Port Arthur.

it is a mere common piece of mechanism beside that marvellous inner organ, which defies time and space, and which no man of science has ever been able to diagnose."

"I suppose I ought to be inured to abuse by this time. When I first began to write, I confess it came to me with a shock of surprise. Even if my work was bad, I was doing my best; I was young, and struggling, and I had others to support beside myself. I had set out with the illusion that nearly every one was kind, and that the others did not matter." Vivian: "Does any criticism matter? What review ever made or marred a book?" Miss Corelli: "I know now that that is true. Perhaps I was foolish to expect to find the world a garden of roses. But it was not so much the criticism I minded as the unkindness. A little child cries if you slap its hand—not because you hurt it, but because you are unkind. Now I have outgrown that feeling to a great extent." Vivian: "The assurance of success is a comfortable balm. Now you may smile at troubles gone who set the victor-garland on." Miss Corelli: "I am always sorry if any one desires to do me ill. I can't help it; I suppose it is a question of temperament. What I mind most is the back-biter, the scribe who stabs in the dark. Fair open criticism is quite another thing. If some one came to me and said, 'Miss Corelli, I have been commissioned to write an article attacking you; I am to be paid two guineas, and I want the money.' I should say 'Very well, that is straightforward; I would rather give you the two guineas, but as that cannot be, say what you like.' It is all very well for a man to be indifferent about abuse. I know you are. I remember, in your 'Whirlwind,' you reprinted all the abuse from other papers; you seemed to revel in it. But a woman owes a duty to her sex. A man thinks literature is outside woman's sphere. What is woman's sphere? To get married, I suppose! But we are forgetting that there are not enough men in the world to go round. If every woman is bound to get married, we shall have to borrow from the East and establish harems."