

Book of the Week.

SHEAVES.*

It is seldom that one meets such wholly and entirely delightful people in fiction as Mr. E. F. Benson introduces us to in his last novel, "Sheaves." In real life they are plentiful enough for those who have eyes to see; in Bookland they are not habitually the chosen, but perhaps the reason for this is not far to seek. It takes a far more masterly hand to extract keen interest from the merely normal than to depict the extravagances of life in a way that will attract and hold the imagination. A story in which there is no villain, in which nobody does anything wrong, and life runs a most every-day course does not seem to contain even the elements of a plot; such a book is "Sheaves," and yet it is safe to say a more fascinating novel has never been penned. In it Mr. Benson is at his very best, and that is saying everything.

The theme, put into a nutshell, is the question as to the advisability of a woman marrying a man considerably younger than herself.

Edith Allbutt at the age of "over forty" looked like a Juno. She had gone through twelve years of misery as the wife of a "dreadful little man" with whom she fancied herself to have fallen in love as a very young girl. Released by his death she set to work to adjust herself to live anew; her natural buoyancy, her lovely character, not only helped her to regain her balance, but also influenced her very appearance. When Hugh Grainger met her for the first time "she existed in her full bloom of beauty, and the mere clumsy measure of years, you would have said, had no significance as regards her. She was poised at the midsummer of life." But Hugh Grainger was in the spring time of his. That he should fall in love with her was inevitable; they had similar tastes, mutual interests, from the very outset she was an inspiration to him. He had an exquisite voice, perfectly trained, with which he was doing nothing—he did not see why he should until egged on by her enthusiasm to ambition. Hugh was one of those beings it is difficult ever to imagine "growing older." His romps with Edith's young niece and nephew, the stories he told them, the make-believe that was all so real to him for the moment, together with his casual outlook on life, all served to prove what a boy he was at heart. Peggy, Lady Rye, who was Edith's sister, was to be excused when she shrank from the thought of Hugh marrying a woman seventeen years his senior.

Yet, when the couple, listening to nothing but the dictates of their own hearts, are married and settled down to apparently unclouded bliss one does wish Peggy had thrown her advice to the bottom of the sea, rather than uttered it. It proved worse than useless—a mischievous, haunting thing destined to poison the cup of happiness.

But to be angry with Peggy herself is an impossibility. She was the most delightful person

* By E. F. Benson. (Heinemann.)

imaginable; everyone loved her, and small wonder. The contrast between her and Canon Alington and his wife with their great friend and admirer, Mrs. Owen, is one of the many good things in the book.

But chief of all is the love story of the main characters, and a very real love story it is. It is to be presumed that we are to deduct Mr. Benson's opinion in the matter from the way in which he ends that rhapsody which began in song and terminates with the same refrain: "Meine Seele, mein herz."
E.L.H.

BY THE STILL WATERS.

Lead me, O Shepherd, with the stricken side
And wounded palm,
Beside Thy waters calm.

My soul is weary by the sorrowing tide,
Of sin's dark sea;
Lead me along with Thee.

Lift me afar from passions fevered cry,
And bid depart
The pride that blinds my heart.

And let me learn, as at Thy feet I lie,
With shame confest,
Thy songs of quiet rest.

By L. Maclean Watt.

COMING EVENTS.

March 5th.—Association for Promoting the Training and Supply of Midwives, Fourth Annual Meeting, Dacre House, Dean Farrar Street, Westminster, S.W., 11.30 a.m.

March 6th.—Infants' Hospital, Vincent Square, S.W. Lecture on "The Infants' Hospital and its Work," by Dr. Ralph Vincent, 5 p.m.

March 10th.—Royal Ear Hospital, Dean Street, Soho. Lecture to Nurses on "Operations on the Ear," by Mr. Macleod Yearsley, F.R.C.S., 4.30 p.m.

March 10th.—Infants' Hospital, Vincent Square, S.W. First of a course of Lectures by Dr. T. N. Kelynack. "Premature Infants." 5 p.m.

March 11th.—Post Graduate Lectures. Gynaecology—I. Syringing and Douching. By Dr. F. W. N. Haultain. Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh, 5 p.m. Nurses cordially invited.

March 11th.—Ulster Branch Irish Nurses' Association, Club Room, Crane's Buildings, Wellington Place, Belfast. "Charity Organisation," Miss Orger, 7.15 p.m.

March 13th.—Miller Memorial Hospital, Greenwich. Lectures to Nurses. "Enemas, Poultrices, Packs, etc.," by Mr. Hugh Davies, 8 p.m.

March 17.—Annual Meeting of Medical Aid Society (to provide medical and surgical advice to poor ladies), at 24, Park Lane, by kind permission of Lord and Lady Brassey, 3 p.m.

A WORD FOR THE WEEK.

Thou that drestest an Event,
While circumstance is but a waste of sand,
Arise, take up thy fortunes in thy hand,
And daily forward pitch thy tent.

—GEORGE MEREDITH.

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