

Book of the Week.

THE CALL OF THE BLOOD.*

Mr. Hichens is now a past master in the art of construction. He has quite lost the temptation to talk tall, to present outlandish subjects, to discuss vast problems of ethics; he is content to take one central situation and develop it with the utmost care, seeking no help from sensationalism, trusting in his own fidelity and good workmanship to make the lives of any real people interesting.

Having in the "Lady with the Fan" given us the tragedy of the beautiful woman, he gives us here the tragedy of the plain woman.

Hermione Lester, 34 years old, and plain "at that," is, when the book opens, about to marry Maurice Delarey, 24 years old, and beautiful to behold.

She announces her intention to Emile Artois, her great friend, a profoundly analytical French novelist. This unsparing analyst of human nature considers, after mature deliberation, that the marriage is unlikely to turn out well. This is the weak point—and it is a serious one—in an otherwise very clever book. When a plain woman of 34 marries an untried boy, a boy with Southern blood in him, a boy who is described as "youth incarnate," we need no French novelist to tell us that the result will be tragedy for the woman. The situation jumps to the eye. But when, on their honeymoon, this purely intellectual lady leaves her Sicilian boy to his own devices in Sicily, while she sails away to Africa to tend the sick bed of Emile Artois, one really feels that all the rest is a foregone conclusion.

Of course the love which is not proof against a few weeks of absence, is not worth having; but then there was never anything in Maurice Delarey to make one think that his love, at that stage of his life, would be worth having.

He was a nice boy, not in the least intellectual. The woman he, in his untried youth, imagines that he loves, is a woman whose whole attraction is intellectual. Such a woman is more profoundly loved than any other, and more faithfully—when the man who loves her is capable of appreciating her. But from the first moment, one sees the kind of boy that Maurice is, and the hopelessness of poor Hermione's future.

The atmosphere of Sicily is given as this writer well knows how to give atmosphere. Maurice, child of the South, suggests at a distance Hawthorne's inimitable Donatello. But, both in theme and treatment, Mr. Hichens here falls far short of that masterpiece of the American writer. The Faun nature was given us, in "transformations," once for all.

But there are qualities in Mr. Hichens' narrative which carry us irresistibly forward with him. The mere joy of living, of physical sensation, of warm sea and sunshine and Etna—the bounding pulse, the strength of primal instinct, it is all entralling while it lasts.

But it is hard to believe that Artois could have been so utterly stupid as to summon the woman whose happiness he sincerely desired, to sit by his

*By Robert Hichens. (Methuen.)

sick bed during her honeymoon. When he comes back with her to Sicily, and finds himself surrounded by the atmosphere of tragedy, we are told that it does just occur to him to wonder whether he has been in any way contributory to the disaster. Which seems to show that the profound student of human nature, sometimes knows a good deal less of the average person than does the man in the street.

G. M. R.

Verse.

If little labour, little are our gains;
Man's fortunes are according to his pains.

—HERRICK.

What to Read.

"Memoirs of the Count de Cartrie: a Record of the Extraordinary Events in the Life of a French Royalist during the War in La Vendée and of His Flight to Southampton, where he Followed the Humble Occupation of a Gardener." With an Introduction by Frédéric Masson.

"Letters and Recollections of George Washington: Being Letters to Tobias Lear and others between 1790 and 1799, showing the First American in the Management of his Estate and Domestic Affairs. With a Diary of Washington's Last Days kept by Mr. Lear."

"Celebrated Crimes of the Russian Court." By Alexandre Dumas.

"Knighthood's Flower." By J. Bloundelle Burton.
"The Master Spirit." By Sir William Magnay, Bart.

"Hazel of Hazledean." By Mrs. Fred Reynolds.

Coming Events.

September 29th.—Meeting of the Executive Committee, Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses, 431, Oxford Street. 4.0 p.m.

October 4th.—Meeting of the Central Midwives' Board, Caxton House, S.W.

A Word for the Week.

"No man is the better for living in a state of perpetual war against accepted ideas. He may be a saint or a prophet, a philosopher or an artist, and the truth that is in him must be uttered whether it be understood or despised; but just so far as he encounters stupidity or injustice, in that degree the finest possibilities of his character and his work must suffer. No man ever did a work in spite of persecution that he might not have done ten thousand times better if he had been encouraged. The soul which becomes feeble under sympathy is not a soul but a shadow cast by some stronger personality. Withdraw the personality and the shadow is no more.—From *The Dream and the Business*.—JOHN OLIVER HOBBS.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)