

Book of the Week.

THE SEVERINS.*

In the history of the Severins we have Mrs. Sidgewick at her best; it is written so brightly, and with such an undercurrent of humour, that even the various domestic tragedies are often almost amusing. As one reads about this family and their strange, unconventional ways, one is impressed by the fact that it is a grave mistake for there to be "no King in Israel." Every one doing what is right in their own eyes is never a success nationally or domestically, and certainly was not so in this case. Mrs. Severin, an emotional, easy-going woman, guided entirely by the last opinion listened to, is in no sense a ruler. They live in the corner house of the Crescent, Regent's Park, and impress the reader at once by their Bohemian mode of living. Very badly off, and wretchedly bad managers, they seem to have arrived quite cheerfully at their last sixpence, when, luckily for them, the eldest son, Michael, returns home. He was brought up by a cousin of his father's, and had been in business in Manchester, Paris, and, for the last seven years, in India, so knows practically nothing of his peculiar family. They are a handsome, clever set of girls, so fully impressed by the fact that nothing but bad luck falls to their lot, that they are prepared to hear that Michael has returned to share their poverty. He is, however, built of different stuff to the rest of his improvident family, has worked so well for his firm that, at the age of thirty, he has been made a junior partner, so will be able to help his mother and sisters more substantially than he has hitherto done. He is somewhat dismayed at the state of utter discomfort and untidiness in which they live; the one slatternly servant seems only to add to the confusion. However, he decides to live with them, at any rate, for a time, if only to get rid of the undesirable friends they gather round them.

His first sight of Deminski, a journalist, is most amusingly told. Michael has heard much about him, his opinions being freely quoted, but it is easy to realise the shock it was to Michael to find Deminski surrounded by the Severin girls, playing wildly on his violin and dancing and shouting, this in the garden in full view of passing churchgoers. This strange sight meets Michael's eyes when he returns home from paying an afternoon call on his senior partner's family. Mr. Walsingham lives in Rutland Gate, a genial, kindly man, his wife and daughters just what one expects well born, carefully brought up women to be, somewhat conventional, and the exact opposite of Michael's own family. He is greatly attracted by the quiet and orderliness of the whole establishment. The Walsinghams receive him kindly, and are inclined to make much of this good-looking, clever young man. The description of Mrs. Walsingham's first visit to Mrs. Severin is graphically and amusingly told. She arrives when the weekly house cleaning is in progress, the char lady being in possession. How it happens one can hardly tell, but the fact that

one wedding leads to another proves true in Michael's case. In a calm way he admires Clara Walsingham, and she has evidently made up her mind to marry him—at least his shrewd sisters tell him so; anyway, whilst arranging Beatrice Walsingham's wedding presents with Clara, Michael is impelled to propose and is accepted. It all sounds very commonplace and unromantic, so that the reader is neither surprised nor disappointed when the young couple mutually find out they are unsuited to each other.

Michael is too staunch and loyal ever to give up his own family, which the decorous Clara fully intended him to do.

In spite of their strange ways, there is much that is attractive in Michael's sisters. Clotilda and Selsna have very advanced views and rather startle one by the wild theories they propound, all drawn from the philosophy of Deminski and his friend, Kremski, whom the girls look upon as "high-souled" people.

The second girl, Camilla, is really quite charming and ordinary, whilst Bob, the small boy of the family, is a nice child, "with the mouth of a saint and the eyes of a sinner." Full of mischief, but no vice in him, his childish beauty wins him forgiveness for his frequent lapses from good conduct.

E. L. H.

Verses.

Once I was part of the music I heard,
On the boughs, or sweet between earth and sky.
For joy of the beating of wings on high,
My heart shot into the breast of the bird.

I hear it now, and I see it fly,
And a life in wrinkles again is stirred.
My heart shoots into the breast of the bird,
As it will, for sheer love, till the last long sigh.

From *Youth and Age*,
GEORGE MEREDITH.

COMING EVENTS.

October 28th.—Central Midwives' Board, Special Meeting to consider what action should be taken with regard to the recommendations of the Midwives' Act Committee. Monthly Meeting at conclusion of Special Meeting. Board Room, Caxton House, S.W., 2.30 p.m.

November 2nd.—Cookery and Food Exhibition, Royal Horticultural Hall, Vincent Square, S.W.

November 4th.—The King opens the new buildings at the National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic, Queen Square, London, W.C.

November 4th.—Society of Women Journalists, Annual Meeting, Waldorf Hotel, 3 p.m. Reception 4 p.m.

November 5th.—Meeting of the Executive Committee, Territorial Force Nursing Service, Mansion House, 3 p.m.

WORD FOR THE WEEK.

Truth has rough flavours if we bite it through.

* Mrs. Alfred Sidgewick. (Methuen.)

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