

Book of the Week.

THE QUESTION.*

To be a "success" or not to be, that is the question.

If pretty Josephine, of ideals, had worried less about her lover "fulfilling himself," and delighted in his charming personality as it was, she would have been a well-advised young woman.

Doubtless it was trying when she had spent a long night planning her answers to quite a number of things he might be expected to say, to be greeted with:

"Josephine, what a fearfully jolly tea! What are we waiting for, *O my heart*? Shan't I ring? Hurry up and make tea. I like you in a green dress, but it will suit you even better after tea. Don't spoil my appetite by being the least little bit stiff, darling. I will take a buttered scone. They almost always disagree with me, and then, with shooting pains everywhere I shall be more in tune with what you think is my positive duty as a reasoning human being.

This was, of course, trying for one who had lain awake all night, wrestling with the problems of existence; yet we confess our sympathies are with Rupert, who, in the cosy firelight, refuses to consider anything, but that he is young, with the woman he loves, and is desperately hungry.

Josephine chooses this moment to complain. It is so different talking to you, from thinking things over alone, your incorrigible levity—"Good word, incorrigible," breathed Rupert.

"Don't!" she said, very much as though he had struck her. "Rupert, don't!"

"I won't," he promised, very quickly and humbly. "I am a pig of the first water."

And then she unfolds to him the conditions on which she will accept him. He is to leave her free. She couldn't "marry the most spotless knight until his spurs were won."

"What am I to do to win my spurs? . . . I don't want 'em honestly. I'd much rather just marry you, and be cosy together, and eat huge teas, and talk rot. And play to you—of course, play to you. I am not forgetting that." He seemed to be speaking very lightly still, but underlying the light words, there rang in Josephine's ear a note of earnestness, of appeal.

But she sends him away. During his absence, there appears on the scene "the other one," the nephew of a neighbouring farmer, who, though not of her own class, is possessed of qualities, besides "magnetic Jewish eyes," which appeal to her far more strongly than anything in Rupert. The scene in which she meets him is the shepherd's hut, where the old man lies dying, is vividly drawn. Penuel Barton asks her:—

"Shall I tell you what I want?"

Josephine was by nature a fighter. "You must please yourself."

But Penuel was a fighter, too, and far cleverer

than she was. "It's your place to say if you will listen," he said.

The appalling waste of life and opportunity if she failed to reap this harvest, so ripe to her touch, overwhelmed her. "Please go on, then," she said.

"Listen, I want you, all of you. . . . Your love to the uttermost depths, your soul, as well as your body, your every thought, your every desire. . . . you." He paused for breathlessness. Though she had not spoken, she was breathless, too.

"Ah!" she gasped.

"He took her in the close embrace of his strong arms and covered her face with his kisses.

"The raised, shocked, condemning voices of her world clamoured in her ears, and heroically she disregarded their cries. In an agony of pity she pressed her cheek, warm with his kisses, against his cool sleeve."

"O, I am sorry for you—sorry for you," she said.

One would have thought the inevitable parting with Rupert that follows would have been final, but his failure at the recital at which he hoped to win his musical "spurs," and the unfavourable criticisms which followed, give Josephine her opportunity for making *amende*.

"You perfect darling," he whispered.

It is not quite satisfying this, and vaguely annoys us. But by all means read "The Question."

H. H.

COMING EVENTS.

March 10th.—British Red Cross Society. Meeting to form a City of London branch, Sir F. Treves speaks, Mansion House, 4 p.m.

March 14th.—Annual Meeting, North London Nursing Association, King Edward Hall, Canonbury, the Mayor of Islington presiding, 8 p.m.

March 15th.—Kent County Nursing Association. Annual meeting. Grand Hotel, Charing Cross, London, W.C.

March 16th.—Meeting at the New Infirmary, Hendon, to inaugurate the Hendon Branch of the Central London Sick Asylum Nurses' League.

March 17th.—Meeting Central Midwives' Board, Caxton House, Westminster, S.W., 2.45 p.m.

March 18th.—London Society for Women's Suffrage. Reception by the Lady Frances Balfour and the Committee at the Great Central Hotel, Marylebone, 9—11.30 p.m.

March 18th.—Women's Social and Political Union. Demonstration at the Royal Albert Hall. Chair, Mrs. Pankhurst. 8 p.m.

March 18th.—Somerset County Nursing Association. Eighth Annual Meeting, Municipal Buildings, Taunton. Address by Miss Amy Hughes, General Superintendent, Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute for Nurses, 3 p.m.

March 23rd.—Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh. Lecture on "Neurasthenia." By Dr. J. J. Graham Brown. Extra Mural Theatre. Nurses cordially invited. 4.30 p.m.

WORD FOR THE WEEK.

"Any life that is worth living for must be a struggle, a swimming not *with*, but *against* the stream."

DEAN STANLEY.

* By Parry Truscott (T. Werner Laurie, Clifford's Inn, W.C.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)