

## Book of the Week.

## ATONEMENT.\*

"I bet you six to one you make him fall head over ears in love with you, Sylvia," he said.

"Done!" she answered.

A foolish challenge, bringing with its acceptance fatal results, undying consequences, the ruin of many lives.

Sylvia was a Colonial born and bred, and had made her first visit to England to finish her education. She was going back to her home at Cape Town after an absence of two years. She was very young, not quite eighteen, and undeniably pretty. Sylvia went her own way, and, regardless of where it led her, turned down the first attractive by-way along the pleasure path of life. She never kept straight forward for any appreciable length of time.

Heredity was no doubt to a great extent responsible for this light, almost wanton nature, for her mother had a "history" and had dealt her husband the cruellest blow of all.

Careless Jack Fullerton, in the idleness of the hour, on board the outward bound liner, little dreamt of the unworthy purpose his foolish bet would arouse in this girl, but a few days later he asks her to consider the bet off. "It wasn't altogether a nice idea for me to put into your mind; leave old Stephen alone, and confine your flirtation to me."

Looking back in after years Stephen Harborough could not fail to realise that she had courted him persistently and determinedly with no higher aim in view than the destruction of his conceived principles of honour. She was fighting the inborn saint in the man. He was not an easy conquest. He had no wish to marry her, but there were times when he considered such a result as not only possible but probable. All the time she conceals from him the fact that she is engaged to Sydney Ainsleigh, the owner of a large farm some miles distant from her father's home, and to whom she has given all the love of which her shallow heart is capable. This makes her intrigue with Harborough incredibly bad, and it is not until she comes face to face with the consequence of her sin that she appears to have had the slightest compunction.

Not so with Harborough.

"The change in his manner which this haunting remorse of conscience brought about was so marked that Fullerton could not but be aware that something serious had happened to trouble his friend's peace of mind. He had endeavoured to make reparation to Sylvia so far as possible by offering her marriage, and was staggered by the news that she was engaged to another man. His engineering work takes him shortly after to a distant farm, where he meets Naomi, his first and only love, and then the man's sin comes home to him with renewed force.

"He had not intended to allow himself to become interested in Naomi, but some undefinable attraction drew him to her, some charm that did not be-

long to her beauty, but added to it, as the scent of a flower will entrance the beauty of the fairest bloom. She was the kind of woman to influence him greatly. Against his judgment and his conscience he asks her to marry him, and love is met by love. But the shadow of his wrong-doing stands between him and the perfect happiness that might have been his.

"Would you give yourself to me supposing you know me to be unworthy of the gift?"

He waited in the heavy stillness for her answer, as a doomed man awaits his sentence. He knew before she spoke what her answer would be.

"No, I couldn't do that. I don't think I could. You wouldn't expect it of me. . . ." "Stephen, there isn't—"

She raised her head again and looked into his face, her eyes searching his in the darkness, inquiring and vaguely troubled.

He silenced the anxious question before it was asked with his lips. After that evening he put away all idea of confessing his sin to Naomi.

The tragedy of poor Sylvia's death—after her lover discovers her unfaithfulness—the generous act of Jack Fullerton in accepting the responsibility of Harborough's sin, are told with dramatic force.

"But from thenceforward Harborough knew no peace. His every wakeful hour was laden with remorse. In this agony surely he might hope to expiate his sin. Conscience is a severe judge. To such a nature as his it spoke with a loud insistence that refused to be stilled." Unable any longer to bear the burden he confesses to his wife: "I was Sylvia Wentworth's lover."

Naomi recoiled from him as she might have recoiled from something horrible.

And in the five long years of their separation Stephen Harborough makes atonement for his sin, and at the end can say: "Thank God for the lonely years, the long, lonely years of my punishment. Oh, Naomi! Oh, my wife! God bless you for your love." H. H.

## VERSE.

"Dare all thou canst  
Be all thou darest; that will keep thy brains full.  
Have thy tools ready, God will find thee work—  
Then up, and play the man."

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

## COMING EVENTS.

July 30th.—The King and Queen visit the London Hospital, E.

August 2nd.—Third International Congress on School Hygiene opens in Paris.

August 3rd.—Examination, Central Midwives' Board, at the Examination Hall, Victoria Embankment, London, W.C.

## WORD FOR THE WEEK.

"Prejudice squints when it looks, and lies when it talks."

"The Earth is for thy body, and the Sky is for thy Soul. Be thou at peace with that which thou hast made to come into being."

Carved on the Sarcophagus of Seti I.

\* By F. E. Mills Young. (John Lane, London and New York.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)