

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

THE WEAKER VESSEL.*

Mr. E. F. Benson's latest work is, as is usual with his efforts, a mixture of amusing caricature and serious psychological study. Only the pity of it is that his talents do not take a wider range. One gets a little wearied of the country c'ergyman's wife, though one is bound to admit that she is generally amusing, that is to say, in Mr. Benson's hands, but we feel that there are many other targets that he might select for shooting purposes. Also his psychic studies are morbid and too often sordid, and leave one with a more unhappy outlook on human nature than is pleasant or wise. We are plunged at the first page into a Harvest Festival at the village church, where the writer is in his element.

Mrs. Ramsden, the vicar's wife, was presiding over the music, her particular characteristic was that she was always very "bright."

"Her temperament was as angular as her person. There were to her no such things as venial sins or faults that could be corrected with a smile instead of a frown. Either a thing was right or it was wrong, for if not, as she sometimes remarked, 'where are we?' That evening she had to go and see what she believed to be a very sad case, and one in which she knew exactly where she was.

"And to think she was a kitchen maid of my own," she said. For the moment Mr. Ramsden drew the inference that other people's kitchen-maids didn't matter so much.

"And the child?" asked the vicar.

"I understand the child is a healthy male," said his wife, finishing her toast and marmalade."

It was to escape from this "bright" lady that Eleanor, her step-daughter, took a situation as governess, where Harry Whittaker comes across her path. Harry Whittaker wrote plays, quite successfully and Eleanor acted in them, at least she did so after their marriage, which came about in due course. But the "lovely cheques that come every Monday," which Eleanor waxes enthusiastic about, can only be won when Harry's brain is stimulated by drink. When Eleanor discovers this, she behaves like a plucky and courageous woman and her love wraps itself round his weak character like a protecting angel's wing.

"Harry, I am so sorry. It was so disgusting to see you like that, and it's so wicked, and so dangerous, but I am glad you told me."

This was all very well, but his vices do not end with intemperance in drink. He has a sordid intrigue with an actress, Marian Anstruther, from which Eleanor again rescues him, or rather, thinks she does. It is pushing forbearance rather far to make Eleanor tolerate his mistress beside her at Harry's sick bed.

"Would you like to see her, dear?" she said. "Shall I ask Sir James if he will let you?"

Then suddenly Harry's eyes grew dim.

"My God, you offer that!"

"Yes, my darling, of course I do, if you wish it."

This episode, of course, stamps its male origin; but it strikes us as ignoble and wanting in self-respect.

Undoubtedly the best thing this poor Harry could have done was to quietly die at this juncture, but for some reason Eleanor at the close of the book is still chained to this feeble character, whose body, in addition, has become paralysed below the waist. It hardly compensates for the waste of love, energy and life for which he is responsible, that he says:

"Oh, Nellie, I owe you everything—absolutely everything. And the debt is no burden. I love it. I shall be cross and tiresome and impatient a million times. But will you remember I am trying to do better?"

"She kissed him."

H. H.

COMING EVENTS.

May 16th.—Q.V.J.I. Bryn-y-Menai Home of Rest for Queen's Nurses. Matinée by the Amateur Stage Club. Royal Court Theatre.

May 19th.—Princess Christian lays the Foundation-stone of the Helena Building of the Royal Free Hospital, 2.45 p.m.

May 21st.—Alexandra Hospital for Children with Hip Disease, W.C. Linen and Clothing Fund. Annual Meeting, 3.30 p.m. Tea and coffee in the Wards, 4 p.m.

May 22nd.—Meeting Central Midwives Board, Caxton House, S.W.

May 24th.—Matrons' Council of Great Britain and Ireland: Quarterly Meeting, 431, Oxford Street, London, W., 3.30 p.m.

May 26th-31st.—Post-Graduate Week at York Road Hospital, S.E.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TRAINED NURSES OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

June 3rd.—Reception of Guests in Royal College of Surgeons, Dublin. 8.30 p.m.

June 4th to 6th.—Conference and Exhibition organised by the Irish Nurses' Association, Royal College of Physicians, Dublin.

IN CHRISTIAN ENGLAND ON SUNDAY.

"But what about the women?" shouted some one in the crowd. "Burn them," came the answer from another quarter, at which there was cheering.—*The Times*.

A WORD FOR THE WEEK.

"All who administer in the government of men, in which they stand in the person of God Himself, should have high and worthy notions of their function and destination; their hope should be full of immortality; they should not look to the paltry pelf of the moment, nor to the temporary, and transient praise of the vulgar, but to a solid permanent existence."—*Burke*.

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

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