

## BOOK OF THE WEEK.

## "FONDIE."\*

This beautiful chronicle of a Yorkshire village is indeed a gem, and the mind that can find no response to it is to be pitied. It should take its place among the classic novels. A long, a very long, closely written book, we yet turn every page grudgingly, savouring the marvellously sympathetic insight, envying the gift that can so convincingly and with such delicate poising, portray things human. And because humanity is so complex, humour goes abreast with pathos and tears are mingled with laughter.

We can't help loving Blanche, the unruly daughter of the vicar. We must let Fondie attract us. All their faults and weaknesses make no difference, we love them the more for their imperfections.

Like Mr. Booth himself, "we will begin with Fondie." A young man, who because of his filial obedience and his Mosaic humility was called Fondie, which means "Foolish one." Male infants strutting in their first breeches would apostrophise him "Fondie, thy feythur wants thee, thoos to look sharp, Fondie." Far from displaying wrath or threatening them with condign punishment, as other men, he would answer politely, "Thank ye, Willom," or "I'm obliged ti ye James Henry," as the case may be, and hasten to obey the message. Let it not however be supposed that Fondie was a fool. His submission to all indignities arose from a natural modesty and a deep seated religion.

These traits in Mr. Booth's hands, so far from becoming tiresome, are relieved with gentle irony and become instead fascinating.

Fondie had a creative genius. A wheelwright by trade, his clever fingers could be turned to almost any use. He had also a musical soul, and played the harmonium in church and it was Blanche's proper duty to perform that office.

"Fondie, you've got to play the organ on Sunday."

"Ye wean't mean choch organ, Miss Blanche."

Blanche said "Of course she did. Fondie must play it. He'd have to play it. He'd got to play it."

Fondie misdocted his ability and he didn't know the choch service.

She said he "needn't want to know it, and she wished she didn't know it either. She was sick of the old service."

When Miss Bryce died Fondie played the Dead March for her with his wonted humility. He wished she might have been spared another month so that he could have played it better.

We will try to convey some idea of Blanche. Motherless, self-willed, full of animal spirits. Her family consisted of a weak old father and two unruly brothers.

Eyes blue as gentian, clouds of golden hair, sound, white teeth, splendid smile, a swinging walk. At sixteen she aspired to no more dignity than a village lass. She compelled the courting and admiration of all the lads for miles round; she wore every day in her belt a posy from some new swain. She was hailed as "Blanche" by all; her boon companion was the carrier's daughter. She hung herself with cheap jewellery, which was confiscated by the Vicar from time to time. She did everything she was dared to do. "I don't care. I aren't frightened, if you think I am." Her prayer book became attenuated from various leaves being distributed in the shape of notes. She sucked humbugs behind what was left of it during the Vicar's sermon. "I don't care. I aren't frightened of him."

But to Fondie she was the object of the most humble adoration and respect. Was she not the Vicar's daughter and he a wheelwright's son? In vain did naughty Blanche try her blandishments upon him, his respectful attitude towards her never flinched. "It was sickening," from Blanche's point of view. Everything that crossed her will was thus described. On the night of her seventeenth birthday she had a sense of dismal disillusionment, and shed tears, and "almost resolved to put up her hair and be as sickening as her father wished her to be; but on the morrow she woke with restored hopes and repaired self-confidence, and her blue eyes scanned the horizon as eagerly for the dancing joy-ships on the blue waters of untroubled life as they had done for many days before."

Poor Blanche! She went unscathed through her rustic courtships, but the new young Squire of Merstham was bigger game, and Blanche, true to her instincts, sought to bring him down. He held her as cheaply as she innocently held herself, and she fell an easy prey.

The terrible consequences of her frivolity and its effect on her family and the village generally are described with poignant force. The carrier's wife is her first confidante. The brimming blue eyes elicit a kindly—

"Come now, and don't cry. Has father been scolding ye? If it had been *some* lasses," she said, and kept watch upon every tear that issued through the weeper's fingers, "... one mud 'a been inclined ti fancy something."

"... Blanche?"

She dropped her voice to utter the name, and it fell upon the owner of it more charged with horror and gloom than the loudest trump of wrath from heaven."

The pathetic picture of the girl facing her trouble alone in the shabby vicarage with her broken-hearted old father and bullying brother is conveyed with consummate skill.

The village tongues wagged and condemned and gloated, but Fondie remained unshaken and respectful.

Near the end of her time Blanche steals out to meet him in the darkness and her despair emboldens him to tell her of his love.

\* By Edward Booth. Duckworth & Co., London.

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