

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

A SHEAF OF BLUEBELLS.*

The feuds of Royalists and the followers of Napoleon Buonaparte form the theme of Baroness Orczy's latest novel.

"Among the many petitions presented that year by *émigrés* desirous of returning to France under the conditional amnesty granted to them by the newly-crowned Emperor, was one signed by Mme. la Marquise de Mortain and by her son, Laurent, then aged twenty-one years, and one signed by M. le Comte de Courson for himself and his daughter, Fernande. Napoleon, in a lenient mood, granted their desire. They were allowed to retake possession of their châteaux and of such of their lands as had not been sold by the State.

There was yet another son of Mme. la Marquise, by a former marriage.

Dubois, Chief Préfet of Police, told the secretary Fouché: "M. de Maurel has been taught to execrate his mother. He was only four years old when his father died, but an uncle brought him up—old Gaston de Maurel—a magnificent patriot, if ever there was one. Nothing of the whilom aristocrat about him . . . eats peas with his knife and wears sabots and a blouse . . . he voted for the death of the king."

Ronnay de Maurel worked on the foundries where he employed five thousand men. He was one of the richest men in France. He and his uncle lived like a couple of peasants in a couple of rooms in the sumptuous château. The fastidious Mme. la Marquise hated this son of hers on every count. He was a follower of the loathed Buonaparte, a bourgeois in his upbringing, manners and dress, and he became the lover of Fernande who was affianced to her adored younger son Laurent.

Fernande began by hating and despising Ronnay, but she coquetted with him in order to win him over to the Royalist party, and she ended by falling a victim herself to the passion that she sought to arouse in him. She plans a meeting with him in the woods, and conveniently sprains her ankle just before the time she knows he will pass.

"She had only just time to arrange her gown in its most becoming folds to decide on the exact position of the sheaf of bluebells and of her outstretched arm, and to assure herself that the sunlight was indeed playing with her hair and with her toes in just the manner she desired. Then she closed her eyes and waited."

She had the strength of mind not to open them till she was quite sure that dark, scowling enquiring eyes were close to her face. Then she opened her own. When she had posed for some minutes she tells him:—

"My name is Fernande de Courson."

"I know that, Mademoiselle."

* By Baroness Orczy. Hutchinson & Co., London. Price 6s.

"We are cousins," she suggested demurely.

"At your service."

"Then I pray you help me to get up."

He was, as usual, dressed in blouse and rough breeches. For a second or two he looked around him in pathetic helplessness, as if he expected the dwellers of the forest to help him in this awful dilemma. But no one came, and the lovely creature whose tiny bare foot looked like an exquisite flower, was appealing, oh, so piteously, for help.

It ended in Ronnay de Maurel carrying naughty Fernande home. He lost his heart completely on the journey, and Fernande in spite of her hatred of the cause in which he was fighting, and in spite of assuring herself to the contrary, was not quite mistress of her own.

"I said that the bear would soon be dancing to my piping," she mused, "and he is standing on his hind legs now ready to begin."

There are many experiences and many exciting episodes before the misunderstandings are removed on either side. Mme. la Marquise plots and schemes for the undoing of her hated elder son, Fernande discovers the plot and saves Ronnay from being treacherously murdered. Laurent goes through tortures of passionate jealousy and deserts from his regiment at a great crisis in order to assure himself of Fernande's feelings. His mother furiously disowns him.

"You are here, my son," she said harshly, "at the post of dishonour, while your father and kindred are fighting for France."

Poor Laurent retrieved his dishonour and died a hero's death, and Fernande is free to marry Ronnay. It is a strong story and well told.

H. H.

SOUTH WIND.

Where have you been, South Wind, this May-day morning,

With larks aloft, or skimming with the swallow,
Or with blackbirds in a green, sun-glinted thicket?

Oh! I heard you like a tyrant in the valley;
Your ruffian haste shook the young, blossoming
orchards;

You clapped rude hands, hallooing round the
chimney,

And white your pennons streamed along the river.

You have robbed the bee, South Wind, in your
adventure,

Blustering with gentle flowers; but I forgave you
When you stole to me shyly with scent of haw-
thorn.

(From the "Old Huntsman" and other
Poems, by Siegfried Sassoon.)

COMING EVENTS.

June 12th.—East London Nursing Society.
Annual service for District and other nurses.
Crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral. 3 p.m.

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