

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

FIRST THE BLADE.*

"Didn't Laura understand? He enjoyed collecting birds' eggs—pottering round the fields with a collecting box.

But after Italy and Botticelli—birds' eggs!

Here was Justin, with his years, his position. Why, why! he had been to Oxford. He would have been a B.A. if he hadn't had influenza. He had been round the world. He knew interesting people. He had once had dinner with Mr. Wells. A man like Justin could do anything he chose—go into Parliament, write a book (Laura was convinced he could write a book if he would only take the trouble) . . . and here he was settling down to collecting birds' eggs! Birds' eggs!!"

Justin is an excellent type of the only son of an affluent and adoring mother, and she a widow.

Self-complacent and indolent by nature, the pursuit of this harmless hobby, which could be indulged in the neighbourhood he loved, grew upon him till it became a passion.

Our authoress cannot undertake to account for this infatuation.

"I am to explain to you a collector. I am to explain why an elderly respectable lawyer runs about Epping Forest with a butterfly net on Sunday afternoons—why your favourite *jeune premier* haunts a down-at-heel farmhouse for the twin china spaniels' sake upon the parlour mantel-piece. How can I explain? What can I say? Collectors are made that way."

In addition to his mother, Justin suffered from the adulation of Laura.

She demands in desperation, "Why birds' eggs?"

But, as Justin said, "Why not?"

They never got any further than that.

Laura was an orphan child who lived with her grandpapa and aunt in the vicinity of Justin's home.

Her dog-like fidelity to the big boy who showed her a careless kindness developed, as she grew up into a beautiful girl, into an adoration which out-rivalled that of his mother.

Eventually Justin proposed to her in a characteristic fashion.

She cannot believe that such happiness is for her.

"Will you marry me, then? Naturally I am in earnest. I am awfully fond of you, really. And the old lady will be awfully pleased."

"Oh, Justin! Oh, Justin! Of course I will!"

"That's all right, then."

There was a naive complacency in his tone; it expressed his sense of a wise measure concluded—no more.

No more, yet, for an instant he had remained leaning towards her with the strangest mingling

of indecision, emotion, and intention in his pose, as if his body were wiser than his soul.

But she, because she was frightened of her own happiness, and of him and his quick movement sat quite still, restraining the answering gesture that would have won him; and the moment passed as a flower without fruit.

"Justin, lazing back again, smiled at her with his immemorial air of comfortable affection. Dear old Laura. He was satisfied with himself—pleased with her."

It was the same thing when it came to the purchasing of the engagement ring.

He was so interested in his new cabinet that he came down from town without it. He was awfully sorry, and Laura said it did not in the least matter.

But she woke up later to a sense of her position, and went home one day and smashed the whole collection of Justin's beloved eggs.

Rather a drastic measure, and the reader is not surprised that it led to estrangement between the pair.

She counts the cost before she acts.

"It's a shock he wants—a shock! He wants tearing up by the roots. The eyes she saw in the glass were full of passion. "I can't hurt him—I can't!" she answers the eyes.

"If it isn't you it will be someone else—some beast of a woman who won't care how she hurts him. It's got to be you!"

At this crisis the war comes to the rescue, and the real manhood in Justin awakes, and he is among the first to answer the call of duty.

But he goes to the front without any suggestion of the old terms between himself and Laura being renewed, although they met on terms of comradeship.

She found at parting they were to shake hands.

"Well, so long," said he.

"So long," said she."

The reader must find out the rest.

Certainly "First the Blade" is a book to read. We were not promised the full corn in the ear, and we are left to wonder if a future book will deal with that problem.

H. H.

A WORD TO TYRANTS.

Let Tyrants fear; I have always so behaved myself that, under God, I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and goodwill of my subjects, and therefore I am come amongst you, as you see; at this time, not for my recreation and disport, but being resolved in the midst and heat of the battle to live or die amongst you all, to lay down for my God, and for my kingdoms, and for my people, my honour and my blood, even in the dust. I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a King, and of a King of England, too.

QUEEN ELIZABETH.

And so say all we British women.

* By Clemence Dane. (London: Heinemann.)

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