

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"ROBIN LINNETT."*

When Mr. Benson writes, as he so often does, of nice, clean healthy English boys of the leisured class, he is always pleasing. His young men are so full of the *joie de vivre*, that their well being radiates from the pages—it simply exudes from them.

Robin Linnett is a good specimen of this type. The son of a wealthy society butterfly, he, at the outset of the book, is just finishing his university career and the opening chapters ring with the merry inconsequent chatter of undergraduates—with cricket, with rags, with intimate talks between Damon and Pythias, and the undercurrent of earnestness in their careless happiness.

Badsley yawned.

"I'm going to be a schoolmaster because the governor is," he remarked. "And Jim's going to be a clergyman, and Birds is going to be a lord. And to-morrow will be Sunday, and I'm going to bed to-day."

Birds and Jim were left alone, and Birds (Robin's very obvious nickname) began undressing.

"I think I shall start being an atheist," he said. "How am I to start. But it's true that we all do what everybody else does. Are you going to breakfast with me to-morrow, or I with you? I forget whose turn it is."

"Yours. And we can't think, at least, I can't. If I sat down to think I shouldn't know what to think about."

He started whistling away to his own room.

But these light-hearted boys were among those who showed what stuff heroes are made of.

For, of course, the war has to come into the story. It seems impossible for any story to get on without it in these days.

Lady Grote, Robin's mother, was right when she remarked, "You never know about Robin"; and she was not unduly surprised when he arrived to her dinner party in an aeroplane which descended on the lawn in the middle of that function. Below his leather coat was a thick woollen jersey, and Robin, in the midst of tiaras and satins, ate his belated dinner with as little sense of embarrassment as he would have felt if he had been picking a cold duck with Damon."

Lady Grote, still young and fascinating, sailed rather near the wind at times as regards her reputation.

Naturally enough, the boy was utterly ignorant concerning the sum of what the world gabbled or whispered about her, and had he been told it he would have believed not a single syllable.

But the war intervened, and the German musician, Kuhlman, after writing a particularly brutal letter to Lady Grote who had favoured him to the brink of indiscretion, returned to his own country to add his quota of information gleaned from his indiscreet admirers.

Lady Grote was frankly bored with war work, but Lord Grote's proposal that they should equip

Grote as a V.A.D. Hospital enlisted her somewhat tardy sympathy, besides, as she said, "I have an idea that Robin is ashamed of my doing nothing for the war. I only realised it to-night and I did not like it."

Mr. Benson gives a rather revolting chapter, in more senses than one, describing in minute detail the amputation of a leg, and it may be supposed that it is not altogether a flight of the imagination to allow the untrained commandant, who is designated "sister," to inform the surgeon that she is going to be present at the operation at the request of the patient. Of course, Lady Grote is portrayed as having all the "heart and sympathy," while "the two nurses were talking together in the window, and one of them was laughing at something the other had said. One rubbed the tips of her fingers together like a girl enjoying something amusing."

How unseemly that this untrained woman should be present the following quotation proves:—

"A button had torn loose as the nurse took the edge of Jaye's pyjama jacket out of the way, and the whole of his body was exposed, strong and supple and charged with the potentiality of its manhood. Soon he would be a truncated thing, an object of pity."

Mr. Benson has not quite grasped the etiquette of the operating room we imagine, nor yet the requisite skill of the anæsthetist, as he allows the patient to come round while he has half a dozen forceps clinging like leeches to his severed veins and arteries, "and Lady Grote listened to a mumble of obscene things."

The rending of the decent veil which formerly was drawn between the professional environment and the curious public, appears in the eyes of the novelist of the past few years, to be essential to make Society butterflies find their souls. Robin's death on the field of glory, however, is his mother's redemption, and results in reconciliation with her husband.

"Through the estrangements, the unfaithfulness, and all the sequel of marriage, that had so soon been void of honour and love, there shone as through rent mists the gold of a gathered harvest. Robin was dead, and she knew now that it was his unconscious inspiration entirely that had caused her to devote herself to the hospital.

"It was here that she had said good-bye to him, wishing him 'good luck with his honour,' and here that he had said that he and she had never loved each other so much as to-day. Gaze as she might at that door, never would Robin be outlined against it as he left her without turning his head. Something dearly loved—his laughing eyes, his mouth, the body of him that was born of her body, were somewhere buried in France.

"Some day, perhaps, she would know how the supreme moment came, but it was no vital part of him that was concerned in that. That was secondary with something else that grew out of the blackness and glowed before her." H. H.

* By E. F. Benson. (London: Hutchinson & Co.)

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