

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

TELL ENGLAND.*

A STUDY IN A GENERATION.

This widely-discussed book can only, however, make a limited appeal, as it deals almost exclusively with the life of public schoolboys as such, and with their subsequent share in the Great War.

But since the future of England's greatness depends upon the schoolboy of to-day, none of us can afford to be uninterested in the psychology of our boys, and we venture to think that Mr. Raymond, who is evidently a boy lover, has got inside what is to the majority of persons an unknown quantity—a boy's mind.

The story treats chiefly of three friends—Archie Pennybet, Edgar Doe and Rupert Ray—boys of widely differing character, of whom Archie was the self-elected Sultan and the senior by two years. He is introduced to the reader as a schoolboy of fifteen, announcing, "I'm the best-looking person in this room. Ray's face looks as though someone had trodden on it, and Doe's—well, Doe's would be better if it had been trodden on."

He chose to remain in a low form. Thoughtless masters called him a dunce, but abler ones knew him to be only idle. He felt it was better to be a field marshal among the kids, than a ranker among his peers. He was right in describing himself as handsome. But if Archie was the handsomest, it was certain that Edgar Doe was the prettiest.

A great deal of the forepart of the book is occupied in the description of school life, of school-boy wrangles and vivacious scoring off one another; of ragging of masters and swift and condign punishment, graphically and intimately described. One unfortunate German master, Herr Caesar Reinhardt, was their especial victim.

"It was our custom to race in a body along the corridors to meet Mr. Caesar and to arrive breathless at his side, where we would walk, one on his right hand and another on his left. In the course of a brilliant struggle several boys would be prostrated, not unwillingly. We would then escort him in triumph to the door, and all offer to turn the lock, crying, 'Let me have the key, sir.' 'Do let me, sir.' 'You never let me, sir. Dashed unfair.' When someone had secured the key he would fling wide the door as though to usher in all the kings of Asia, but promptly spoil this courtly action by racing after the door ere it banged against the wall, holding it in an iron grip like a runaway horse, and panting horribly at the strain. This morning I was honoured with the key and saw that it was stuffed up with dirt and there would be some delay outside the classroom door, while the key underwent alterations and repairs. 'Has any boy,' I asked, 'a pin?'"

None had, but Pennybet offered to go to Bramhall House in search of one. He could do it in twenty minutes, he said.

One is alternately carried away by their light-hearted nonsense and saddened by their underlying temptations and wistful secret aspirations. Of course, there is the inevitable hero-worship supplied in this case by Mr. Radley, a master of some severity, who never hesitated to administer necessary chastisement and who "whacked" in a very thorough and complete fashion.

The lad who is telling the story, says of him:—

"I always left Radley's room feeling that I could blast a way through every mountain. He invited me to his room one evening and sat me in an armchair opposite to him; and then he talked, while I watched the fire getting redder as the room grew darker. He spoke so fearlessly as to be quite unrestrained and natural. And when he said, 'You mustn't mind my talking to you like this,' I could only reply, 'Oh, it's all right, sir.'"

"But once again I left his room, feeling that, though already I had my reverses in the moral contest of which he spoke, I would win through in the end."

Would there were more Mr. Radleys in our schools!

And then came the war and commissions for these young fresh-faced lads and the gazetting of the two friends, Doe and Rupert, to the same battalion and their falling in with the Padre Monty on their passage to the Dardanelles and their first introduction to vital religion. Then Doe's pathetic death—Doe, who always loved to be dramatic.

Rupert says: "I loved him for being the same self-conscious heroic character up to the last. The brilliant eyes sought out Padre Monty. Doe gazed at him and laughed nervously. 'I wonder if I shall be here to-morrow when you come!'"

"Throughout my life I shall remember Doe's look, when he saw that Monty was not going to dispute his statement. His wide eyes stared enquiringly; then they filmed over with a slight moisture, for they belonged to a boy not yet twenty."

Padre Monty, endeavouring to console Rupert, who had loved Doe enthusiastically, tells him that Doe had often said he wanted to do a really perfect thing unspoiled by any desire for glory. "And, Rupert, he told me this afternoon that, when he went to put out that gun, he felt quite alone; he seemed to be surrounded with smoke and flying dust; and he thought he would do one big deed unseen. . . . He did his perfect thing at the last." Thus died the lad who had ever been tempted by the limelight.

Archie Pennybet, who had left school, determined to conquer the world, and, coolly confident of his power to mould circumstances to his own end, was put out by a high explosive shell. "So numerous were his bandages that the chaplain saw nothing but the lazy eyes and the mouth that had flamed impudence for twenty years. He had had a good time, he said. "If God puts me through it I shan't whine." As the end drew

* By Ernest Raymond. (Cassell & Co.).

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