

The Best Thing.

BY ANNIE S. SWAN.

TWO who had been friends of long standing, though separated by distance and circumstance, talked together in a woodland place regarding life and its meaning. They had not met for ten years, but had arrived by different paths at almost the same point of view. But this neither knew. In the interval there had been no correspondence, and the sense of separation had at times, for the woman, been keen. There was no romance, nor anything in the friendship to warrant the misused term Platonic being applied to it. The woman in the meantime had married, the man remained as before, and she had been surprised to discover in him so little change. It was a meeting she had dreaded, perhaps because she had something to hide.

For her lot, though to the outward vision apparently a happy one, had failed to satisfy.

It had a secret care. "You seem unsettled now you have come home," she said, as she took a side glance at his face. It was by no means a handsome or interesting face, and she had been a worshipper of beauty from her childhood up.

It had been one of her grievances that the outward shape of her friend had none of the ideal about it. Solid worth was there beyond a doubt, and that winning and understanding sympathy which is a cord the heart of woman does not resist. Equipped with such quality, a man may go up to the dragon's mouth, for he must certainly win.

He was one to inspire trust, albeit too grave for the primrose paths of flattery, and many told their secret care to him, certain of his sympathy and whatever help was at his command. And he had never in his life betrayed, even in thought, the confidence men and women had bestowed on him; for his friends were of both sexes, and he was trusted by both.

"Ten years is a big slice out of life," he made answer. "Seeing you now, the wonder is that no more has happened in it."

"What do these words mean?" she asked. "You told me yesterday there was very little change in me. In you, so far as looks go, I find now change whatever. Do we not begin precisely where we left off?"

"It was just here where we talked last," he said, pausing on the ridge, where a sweep of Surrey moorland met their view. "It was an April morning, too. Do you remember?"

"I remember, and we spoke of this day, then—the day of our meeting. I mean—and I predicted how we should feel."

"Yes, and has it come true?" he asked.

"So far as you are concerned, yes," she answered, without even a momentary hesitation. "We might have parted yesterday. But I am another woman. I suppose it is inevitable. Ten years in a woman's life!! O! it does not bear thinking of."

"Why?" he asked, gently. "Ten years to you might be as ten months or weeks to another, so lightly does time bear you on."

"I don't look old," she said with a sudden