

The Finer Way

By E. F. Benson. Author of "Dodo," etc., etc.



LINOR Gascoigne had done what everybody with one exception had for the last couple of months been urging her to do, and had to-day accepted the devotion of Lord Evesham which she felt sure was as profound as it was patient, and now she was sitting in her room in the rather noisy flat which she had occupied

for the last five years finding out by very honest catechism of herself what her verdict on herself was.

There was everything, or almost everything, to be said for the decision which had cost her so much heart-searching: indeed there was so much to be said for it that it really seemed to her that she need not have been so long in making up her mind. She liked him personally quite without reservation, and without reservation was her respect and admiration for his character. He had long been a friend, their friendship indeed dated from before the death of her first husband Walter Gascoigne, and when two months ago he had asked her to marry him, on his return from his Governorship at Bombay, she knew well to how safe an anchorage in any possible storm that life might hold, he was inviting her. He was fifteen years her senior, but a woman of thirty-five, so her mother had been diligent in pointing out to her, was not, in Nature's secret census, at all younger than a healthy and well-preserved man of fifty.

ELINOR wondered, when Mrs. Vanbrugh and she had been having what Mrs. Vanbrugh called 'such a good talk' (which meant that her mother had practically never been silent) whether she had ever understood her at all. Sometimes she seemed to be a visionary child, sometimes, a Christian martyr, sometimes a mere calculating materialist. In some of their 'good talks,' she appeared to combine all three, unless like some quick-change artist, she assumed one role after the other, with bewildering rapidity. One such 'good talk' had occurred only yesterday.

"Never would I urge you, my darling," her mother had said "to accept a man you did not truly love. You are quite happy in your dear little flat" (she had to raise her voice over this, since an underground train made the whole room quake and rattle) "and you, like myself, would be the last person in the world to do anything which your highest instincts did not prompt you to."

The underground train had passed, and Mrs. Vanbrugh could allow her voice to sink again to its ordinary gentle querulous tone.

"Darling, I should hate the idea that you let the thought of me, or your children enter into your decision," she said. "As you know, I ask for nothing more during the few years that probably remain to me, than to be able to live quite simply and frugally, as I have always lived, and leave to you and your boys the little I have managed to save. Dear Willie! If we club together we shall be able to send him to school next September, and no doubt means will be found to let Jack go too, when he is old enough. You must not let the thought of any provision for them or me influence your decision."

NOW here was one of the puzzles about Elinor's mother. While she spoke, Elinor felt no doubt that she meant precisely what she said, but she meant so many other things as well. She proceeded to say some of them.

"Of course, it's the romance of Lord Evesham's life," she went on. "Dear Arthur—darling, I am practising calling him Arthur in case you settle

trying to think of him as Arthur, I should be thinking of him as Sir Galahad. It would be a dreadful responsibility for you to think that you had denied him his one chance of happiness. All his riches and his pictures and his career mean nothing to him compared to you."

Elinor gave a little bubble of laughter. When she laughed her eyes laughed first, her mouth afterwards. She had rather a boyish face; you would have thought—except for Mrs. Vanbrugh's remark on the subject—that a woman of thirty-five was far more akin to a boy of twenty than to a man of fifty.

"Oh, I'm not in competition with his pictures and his wealth," she said.

"Darling, how you misunderstand me! I said, or I meant, that he has everything in the world that a man could want, and that you with one word could give him more than them all. Sometimes, dear, I think you are a wee bit selfish. You are apt to withhold happiness from others, sooner than sacrifice yourself."

"Sacrifice myself?" asked Elinor.

"You misunderstand me again," said Mrs. Vanbrugh, "if you think I mean that your marriage would be anything but the fulfilment of all that is best and noblest in you. But you cling to your little poky independence a wee bit, in your poky little flat."

"Dear little flat you said just now," remarked Elinor.

"Yes, darling, it is a dear little flat but poky. You will not let me explain myself. We women have to live for others. You have to live for your children, and give them a sound education, and a good chance of a start in life. And though I should be the last to speak of myself, you do owe perhaps a little to me. You owe it to me to let me see you happy and prosperous when such a chance comes in your way. Mothers live for their children. At least I know I always did. And then you should remember what dear Walter's last words to you were. You have been a long time already carrying out his wishes. He hoped you would marry again, poor boy. How much more would he hope it now, if he could see your boys and his getting such big fellows, and all without a father's care."

ELINOR with her tender loving conscience felt herself to be a brutally selfish person when her mother had taken herself and her sage advice away, and had hopped nimbly into a bus at the corner of the shabby little road. On all sides there seemed to be folk, near and dear to her who thrust her in one direction, where two adoring arms were held wide to welcome her. Was she, after all, being selfish in her hesitation? Was she expecting at the mature age of thirty-five that nameless ineffable quality of yearning that she had known twelve years ago, when Walter and she had found each other? Was she demanding of life and of love more than they could give her, at this period? And was she, finally, denying to love, the love of her mother, of her children, of her lover what it was her privilege to give them? She was poor, and quite candidly she told herself that for herself she did not mind that. But she minded not being able to give her children what money would enable her to give. All winter

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 28)

Mr. E. F. Benson—"Nuff Said"

IF MR. E. F. BENSON were not one of the greatest writers of the day, we would proceed to tell you all about him. But you already know him, and his illustrious brothers, Mr. A. C. and the late Robert Hugh; his father too, the late Archbishop of Canterbury. The younger trio have been outstanding figures in the literary world for the past quarter of a century.

Do you remember when you read Mr. E. F. Benson's "Dodo"? You waited anxiously for his next—did you not? And you were pleased with "The Rubicon", "The Vintage" "The Angel of Pain." Then came "Oakleyites" in the first year of the war.

His short stories have been as compelling as his novels. We offer you "The Finer Way," without comment. It will speak for itself.

When you have read it, congratulations to us upon acquiring it will be in order. With true humility, we will accept them gladly—in fact, we are waiting for them—
THE EDITORS

to marry him, and I am getting quite used to it—dear Arthur has never fallen in love before. He told me so himself: I could have kissed him when he said that. You are the great and only romance of his life, and I wonder if you realize what a privilege and honour that is. I assure you that if I was not

children, and give them a sound education, and a good chance of a start in life. And though I should be the last to speak of myself, you do owe perhaps a little to me. You owe it to me to let me see you happy and prosperous when such a chance comes in your way. Mothers live for their children. At least I



Just baubles; just silly things," said he. "May I put them round your neck"? As he fastened it for her she felt his lips on her neck where the pearl clasp came. . . . She gave a little shudder quite involuntary.