

A Book of the Week.

THE CHALLONERS.*

One of Mr. Benson's many charms is that you never quite know what to expect of him. His instrument is gifted with many strings, and his books are so varied that some of them might easily be credited with a different authorship.

"The Challoners" is emphatically in his best manner. It is the illustration, natural and unforced, of the kind of struggle which has been going on in thousands of English households ever since Mr. Ruskin preached his gospel of beauty and truth and thoroughness.

To us who live in the heart of things, and—many of us—in the van of progress, the particular kind of clash which is here represented with such amazing skill may not appeal with such force. But to anyone who knows anything of the life of the provinces the truth of it cannot fail to hit hard.

Mr. Benson takes an extreme case. He gives us an English clergyman, after the strictest sect of Anglicanism in its most uncatholic aspect. This man, falling wildly in love, with all the strength of his strong, fine nature, married, in his youth, a creature all sparkle and fire, a semi-Italian, a young, gay girl, with whom he had really hardly anything in common. We see such marriages every day. The Puritanism of her husband's atmosphere acted like a veritable blight upon the girl. She died, soon after giving birth to twins—a boy and a girl.

Martin and Helen Challoner grew up under the shadow of their father's unrelenting rule. They are both to be, without shadow of question, what he intends them to be, simply because he intends it. He being a clergyman, Helen's life is to be that of a deaconess; Martin is to be a classical scholar, simply because his father would derive such pleasure from the fact that he was one. But Martin and Helen have both inherited the artistic temperament from their dead mother. Martin is not only a musician but a genius. The awful, inevitable struggle between the father and the children is shown here.

There are plenty of sparkling interludes—much wit. Lady Sunningdale and her dogs—Sahara and Suez Canal—are in the author's best "Dodo" manner. But the under tissue of the story is pure tragedy.

Helen, who is a perfectly charming girl, falls in love with Lord Yorkshire, who is an atheist. We may demur in passing; Lord Yorkshire is drawn too intelligent for an atheist—too rich in those fine correspondences which usually preclude so vacant a posture of mind. But it has to be, for the purposes of the story. Helen declines to give up her lover; and in this, both the author and the altogether charming Aunt Susan appear to think her right. They pass over the bitternesses of the girl's future—the inevitable rift which must widen between her and a husband who is deliberately facing another way than hers—the tragedy of the two walking together, not only not agreed, but severed by the widest gulf which the mind of man is capable of conceiving. Helen holds to her engagement, and Martin, after being emancipated from Cambridge, and allowed to follow his own bent, does what is the most natural thing under the circumstances—he joins the Roman Communion.

* By E. F. Benson. (Heinemann.)

It is typical of the true nature of Mr. Benson's genius that he is able to give Mr. Challoner's side of the question. The man is no heartless brute, no creature of rule and line, but a man, and a great man. His love to his children is second only in power to his allegiance to his God, as he interprets it. His anguish, his humiliation, his gradual enlargement of mind, and perception that God fulfils himself in many ways, not necessarily in his way, are given with a poignancy which awakes true sympathy. We may feel inclined to think that the author's contention, that the difference between the English and Roman branches of the Church is the difference between the nature that craves for beauty and that to which beauty is meaningless, is not a fair one. It was chiefly the English love of truth, not the English indifference to beauty, which brought about the great split.

G. M. R.

The Path.

A little path meanders through the glade,
Threading a leisured way betwixt the trees;
A glistening path, by happy footsteps made,
Sun-flecked and dappled in the gentle breeze.
A sudden storm; and forthwith reckless feet,
That quarrel with its mazy winding way,
Trample and bruise it in their passage fleet,
Impatient now of tortuous delay.
The path, all wet with tears, trod into mire,
Roughened and ragged, yet may mend again;
May even yet lead on to our desire
Tho' travelled in perplexity and pain.
So in our lives, our ills may find their cure,
And the sun shine, tho' hidden scars endure.

V. B.

From the *Westminster Gazette*.

Verse.

Yet though all this be thus,
Be those men praised of us
Who have loved and wrought and sorrowed and not
For fame or fear or gold, [sinned]
Nor waxed for winter cold,
Nor changed for changes of the worldly wind.

What to Read.

"Russia as It Really Is." By Carl Joubert.
"The Challoners." By E. F. Benson.
"A Lonely Summer in Kashmir." By Margaret Cotter Morison.
"The Great Frenchman and the Little Genevese." Translated from Etienne Dumont's "Souvenir sur Mirabeau" by Lady Seymour.
"The Bright Face of Danger." By Robert Neilson Stephens.

Coming Events.

July 30th.—Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Society for State Registration of Trained Nurses, 431, Oxford Street, 4.30 p.m.

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