

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"UP AND DOWN."*

We must congratulate Mr. E. F. Benson on having abandoned his well-worn themes of prosperous villadom and country rectory and giving us instead a book that is more worthy of his pen, and which savours more of the writings of his brother, the late Monsignor Benson.

"Up and Down" takes the form of an intermittent diary between May, 1914, to April, 1917, but it is not primarily a war novel. Perhaps it is hardly correct to call it a novel at all. It has little to do with love in the popular sense, but it deals with the deep, close friendship of two men—the writer and one Francis—and for the rest it is chiefly about Italy, the attraction of which is charmingly described.

"Francis has been an exceedingly wise person in his conduct of life. Some fifteen years ago he settled, much to the dismay of his uncle, who thought that all gentlemen were stockbrokers, that he liked Italy much better than any other country in the world.

Having come across the Bay of Naples for the inside of a day, he telegraphed to the hotel for his luggage and stopped a month. After a brief absence in England, feverish with interviews, he proceeded to stop here for a year, and when that year was over to stop here permanently. In course of time he inveigled the writer to share with him the Villa Tiberiana. "It was too big for him alone, but if I felt inclined to go shares in the rent we might take it together. So when a fortnight ago I returned here, I made my return home not to Italy alone but to my home in Italy." They had some charming times, these two boon companions, in making their newly-acquired villa already described as an "amiable dwelling," a home after their own heart. It is Mr. Benson's charm that he can portray the little happenings in such an attractively descriptive manner.

"This island life is the busiest sort of existence, though a stockbroker would say it was the easiest and in consequence these social efforts give one a sense of rush I have never felt in London. The whole of the morning is taken up with bathing, and on the way up you call at the post office for papers and letters. The letters it is impossible to answer immediately, since there is so much to do and the pile on my table grows steadily, waiting for a wet day.

After lunch you read the papers. Then you have a good siesta, and so on till, as natural in the country, you go to bed early, and behold it is to-morrow almost before you knew it is to-day.

Francis asserts that he does an immense quantity of work in the winter. "I dare say that is so."

The approach of the sirocco broke up the *dolce far niente* of this attractive state of things.

"Pasqualino banged down the macaroni on the table and spilled the wine and frowned and

shrugged till Francis told him abruptly to mend his manners, or let Seraphino serve us, on which for a moment the sunny Italian child looked out from the clouds and begged pardon and said it was not he but the cursed sirocco. And then, following on the cloud in the sky that had spread so quickly over the heavens, came the second cloud.

"Francis had just opened the Italian paper and gave one glance at it. "Horrible thing," he said "The heir to the Austrian throne and his wife have been murdered at Serajevo. Where is Serajevo? Pass the mustard, please."

Francis is glad he is a denationalised individual. "If I have a motherland at all, it is this beloved stepmother land.

Damnable as I think war is, I think I could fight for her if any one slapped her lovely face."

But when the real need came, Francis was true to England.

"It's really such a relief to find that I didn't cling to what I had; I was always afraid I might when it came to the point. But it wasn't the least effort to give it up, all that secure quiet life; the effort would have been not to give it up."

"And when the war is over?" I asked.
"Why, naturally, I shall go back to Alatri by the earliest possible train, and continue thinking."

Francis was not killed in the war, but died of malignant disease in his beloved villa at Alatri.

"To those who have loved the lovely and the jolly things of this beautiful world the day of little things is never over. . . ."

We talked of pleasant and humorous little memories of the past, and plans for the future, just as if we were spending one of the serene summer evenings the last time we were near here together.

We settled I should go back to Rome the day after to-morrow, and return if possible for Easter.

"For that," said Francis cheerfully, "will be about the end of my tether. The end, I mean, in the sense that I shan't be tethered any more."

At the end of those ten days there was a great change in Francis; he had drifted far on the tide that was carrying him away.

At the end he bids his friend "go to the very top of Monte Gennaro to get the very biggest view possible, and stand there and thank God for everything there is. Say it for yourself and me. Say 'Francis and I give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory.' That's about all there is to say, isn't it?"

"I can't think of anything else."
"Off you go, then," he said. "Oh, Lor'! I wish I was coming too; but I'll go to sleep instead. Good-bye."

Very early on Easter morning his friend returned to finish reading, as he had promised, the chapter in the Bible begun the evening before.

"I saw Francis sitting up." He was gazing with bright eager eyes to the entrance of the pergola, and in that moment I knew he saw there Him Whom Mary supposed to be the gardener.

H. H.

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

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