

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"THE GODS DECIDE."*

Mr. Richard Bagot's novels of Italy and of the Roman faith, have at times been too controversial to give them a wide popularity; but in this present book he abandons the exclusively dogmatic attitude, and indeed the religious atmosphere is subservient to the patriotic.

For this story is about the breaking out of the war, and the attitude of Italy on the crisis.

Ezio Luciani, Conte di San Fedele, was originally of humble origin. Late in the eighteenth century a Luciani had been nothing more or less than a marble cutter somewhere in the neighbourhood of Pisa. The lands and castello of San Fedele, for centuries the property of one of the greatest Tuscan families, came into the market, and Enrico Luciani bought them and also the title of count."

The father of Ezio with whom this story is concerned, who was of doubtful reputation, dissipated the patrimony, and when Ezio became of age to marry it was found necessary that he should wed a bride with a good *dot* in order to retrieve the fallen fortunes of his house. He married Elena Girette without love, but with genuine liking. Shortly after her marriage her father became bankrupt, and the very necessary dower was never realised.

It was at this juncture that Ezio's wealthy young cousin came to stay at the castle as a paying guest, and her contribution, according to her late father's wishes, was of a very liberal character.

Ezio discussed this with the parish priest, Don Guiseppe, who pointed out that out of the twenty thousand lire a year Ezio would be something like fourteen thousand lire to the good. "One would think some saint had intervened," he said.

"Provided it is not the devil who has intervened," said Ezio.

Don Guiseppe looked at him quickly. "In that case you can defeat him if you choose," he said quietly.

Elena Luciani looked frankly upon the arrangement as a piece of good fortune, and discouraged Ezio's idea that it could not last long.

"She will probably marry" he said, "and quickly too, since she is so rich."

"Perhaps," said Elena; "one never knows. At any rate—one—two—three years—it is always something."

Ezio being a high-minded man, thought distastefully of making money out of his young cousin.

"Of course, it will be useful while it lasts; but there might be a temptation to make it last too long."

"You are too quixotic, amico mia," she said with a slight laugh, "and we cannot afford to be quixotic."

*By Richard Bagot. Methuen & Co., London.

Vittoria and her maid arrived in due course, and alighted at the little station some two hours from Florence. "There had been many who turned to look at the beautiful girl in deep mourning who, with quick Florentine intuition, they guessed to be Italian, though certainly not Tuscan, and decided that from whatever part of Italy she might come, she was evidently *una signorina assai distinta*."

Elena compares very unfavourably with her husband's young cousin, and it transpires in time that she is in the habit of taking morphia, and displays all the ill characteristics that are associated with the habit.

When Italy declared war, she aroused suspicion in the village by her pro-German attitude, and bitterly resented Ezio's resolution to join up. She allows her husband to go to the front without bidding him adieu.

"Figure to yourself, Mademoiselle Vittoria," said Jeanne, "that she has allowed monsieur le comte to depart without even seeing him to say good-bye, as if he had merely gone on a pleasure trip. It is incredible."

Elena's coldness towards her husband was accounted for when she was denounced as a spy, but at her arrest she ended her own life.

Vittoria's maid Jeanne, a year later, pointed out to the priest Don Guiseppe, Vittoria and Ezio sauntering along the bank of the stream.

"It would seem, M. le Curé," she said, "that in this case the gods have decided well. Of course le bon Dieu does not like other gods to be spoken of."

He glanced in the direction indicated. "In this case," he said, "I think it is the same thing. Le bon Dieu works in many ways."

H. H.

LA PAIX EN FRANCE.

Proud ravaged France, the guns no longer press against your throbbing heart.

Across the pale-lit sky ring doves and starlings fly not far apart.

From the brown earth the blades of grass spring green untinged with red.

And the low drifting clouds breathe soft beneficence upon your dead,

Your dead and ours, wrapped in mysterious dreamless sleep,

While in the distance shadowy, sombre pines their vigil keep.

Between the rows of crosses veiled women gently tread, Their voices hushed, and in their arms sweet-scented flowers for the dead.

Near the brown mounds they kneel in prayer, their dark eyes bent.

A bell steals on the misty air—their work seems like a sacrament.

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Women of France, our sons and yours lie in Eternal Sleep.

With reverent hands you tend our dead, while we may only weep.

F.M.E.S., in *The Argus*.

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