

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"QUEEN LUCIA."*

Mr. Benson is so renowned for his amusing satire on the foibles of his fellow creatures, that the present volume needs no recommendation. Queen Lucia (pronounced in the Italian mode *la Lucia* the wife of Lucas) ruled the village of Riseholme with a secure autocracy pleasant to contemplate at a time when thrones were toppling and imperial crowns whirling like dead leaves down the autumn winds.

It was she who had been the first to begin the transformation of this remote Elizabethan village into the palace of culture that was now reared on the spot where ten years ago an agricultural population had led their bovine and unilluminated lives in these greystone or brick and timber cottages.

When Mr. Lucas had amassed sufficient thousands of pounds in firm securities, she had easily persuaded him to buy three of these cottages that stood together, in a low two-storied block, and had by judicious removal of partition walls transmuted them into a most comfortable dwelling adding on a new wing running out at right angles at the back, which was if anything, a shade more blatantly Elizabethan than the stem on which it was grafted. Mr. Benson is at pains to describe the house in detail which was as blatantly Elizabethan within as without. Her Shakespeare garden was surrounded by a yew hedge brought entire from a neighbouring farm, which cast its monstrous shadows of the shapes into which it was cut across the little lawn inside.

It was part of Lucia's form of culture to converse in Italian, but their Italian, firm and perfect as far as it went, could not be considered as going far.

Thus on Lucia's return after an absence, she was greeted by her husband with:

"*Lucia mia! Ben arrivata!* So you walked from the station."

"*Si Peppino, mio caro,*" she said, "*sta bene.*"

It was interesting to talk Italian, however little way it went." Georgie Pilson was her gentleman in waiting, her A.D.C., her devoted attendant. In order to save subsequent disappointment it may be at once stated there never had been or ever would be the smallest approach to a flirtation between them. Neither of them, she with her forty respectable years, and he with his blameless forty-five years had ever flirted with anyone at all.

But it was one of the pleasant fictions of Riseholme that Georgie was passionately attached to her.

Georgie was the type of man dear to Mr. Benson's heart, a male old maid, and an inveterate though amiable gossip.

Next to Lucia he was the hardest worked inhabitant of Riseholme, and as he was not strong he had often to go away to the seaside.

"Travelling by train fussed him a good deal, for he might not be able to get a corner seat, or

the porter might be rough with his luggage, so he usually went in his car to some neighbouring watering place where they knew him."

He had in common with the rest of Riseholme, strong artistic tastes, and in addition to playing the piano made charming little water colour sketches, which he had framed at his own expense and presented to his friends.

At the period at which the story commences, Riseholme was thrilled by the advent of a Brahmin, whom Mrs. Quantock, having abandoned Christian science, had annexed in order that she might successfully practice Yoga, and an amusing account is given of this imposter, who was in reality a waiter, and how he very successfully made fools of Riseholme Society.

The next excitement was the purchase of a house in the village by the prima donna, Olga Bracey, and the gradual dethronement in consequence of Lucia.

She invites Lucia and Peppino to meet the great Italian composer Signor Cortese, in order that they may converse with him in Italian. They find themselves in a most uncomfortable situation in consequence, told in Mr. Benson's best style, and which ended in the ignominy of the composer's suggestion. "Now we all spick English. This is one very pleasant evening I enjoy me very much. Ecco!"

This is quite a book for a lazy holiday afternoon. Its subject is of course trivial, and in other hands than its author's, might be banal.

We cannot help wishing that Mr. Benson would devote his great talent to more serious work, though we are grateful to him for his charming contributions to the lighter side of life.

H. H.

VERSES.

We cannot kindle when we will
The fire that in the heart resides.
The spirit bloweth and is still,
In mystery our soul abides;
But tasks in hours of insight will'd
Can be through hours of gloom fulfill'd.

With aching hands and bleeding feet
We dig and heap, lay stone on stone;
We bear the burden and the heat
Of the long day, and wish 'twere done.
Not till the hours of light return
All we have built do we discern.

—Matthew Arnold.

A WORD FOR THE WEEK.

"Always to one who wants to do his duty it will become plain in the long run that he has to be prepared to stand alone, or at any rate to go against the majority."—Bishop Gore.

COMING EVENTS.

September 2nd.—Fête and Sale of Work, on behalf of the Prince of Wales' General Hospital, Tottenham, arranged by the Sisters' Hospital Aid Association.

September 5th to 20th.—Third Congress of International Associations, Brussels.

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

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