

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"THE OLD ROAD TO SPAIN."*

We recall the writer of this book to our readers' minds as the gifted authoress of the fascinating stories "Crump Folk Going Home" and "The Lonely Plough," and, having said this, we feel that they will need no further inducement to obtain and read it. Miss Holme's great charm lies in her love of Nature, and her power of impressing its varying moods and inner meanings. These are things that are hid from the wise and prudent, and can only be interpreted by those who are willing to sit on her lap and be taught by her.

All Nature is beloved by Miss Holme—the vegetable, animal and human. She interprets the blossom of the spring, the elemental fury of the wind, and the childlike heart with equal appeal.

Two brothers—the eldest and youngest—with more than twenty years between them. Rowland, the elder, the well-beloved Squire of his village, "chatty," fussy, full of good works and duties appertaining to his position, the slave of his former sweetheart, Mrs. Garnett, who in her turn was the slave of every committee meeting, bazaar and local function that she could cram into her life, and, incidentally, into poor Rowly's.

Luis, the younger man in the diplomatic service, had just returned from a long sojourn in Spain, and was a hark back to some Spanish ancestor. Both were unmarried.

It was an unwilling return on his part, and was due to nervous breakdown and medical orders. He felt the fell side dead and depressing after the loved country of his adoption, and Rowly's fussy local busyness intolerable. He received a warm welcome from the kindly, affectionate little man, who regarded his brother with immense pride, and always alluded to his "career." But Luis, from the first drive from the station home to his brother's house, felt something above and beyond the mere natural feeling of depression in the change of surroundings. There was something, so to speak, he could not "get at," something that everyone seemed to be trying to keep from him. A flock of sheep came down from the fellside—the horse refusing to pass them—quite a simple affair, and yet, in spite of Rowland's cheery remarks, "It isn't often they get down. Very jolly mutton they make"; his face was averted from his brother, and had nothing in common with his speech. It wore a look of awed piteousness and sheer dismay.

The flock thus coming down from the hills was the family death warning of the head of the house.

Kind, fussy Rowly was determined that his young brother should be kept in ignorance of this.

Not one, but many warnings did Rowly receive, and as the story proceeds we are won with the simple courage of the little man, in spite of his natural shrinking from death.

Here is one description of the warning.

"In and out through the trees, and the fantastic vapour winding among them like torn ribbons, or wandered banks of clouds, the grey shapes hurried and pressed, passing and repassing with soft, panting breath, and little scuffling, padding feet."

The recurrence of this experience might well unnerve the boldest.

Rowland's love disappointment in his youth had been due to these grey visitants. She, who was now Mrs. Garnett, had been dissuaded from association with such uncanny experiences.

Rowland had never replaced her even in thought, but kept up his domestic standards by pretending that there was the "Lady of the House" whose wishes it was his duty to consult.

Crane, his man-servant, who adored him, shared both his apprehensions and his simple pleasures. The bazaar held by Mrs. Garnett's desire in his beautiful gardens and on his carefully tended lawns is described with a sympathetic and descriptive pen. "He went patiently, crossing the lawn from one stuffy tent to another, to take up his post behind a large barrel and a pair of tongs, forcing himself to the part of cheerful showman, huckstering his wares. He could hear the brass band down in the park. . . . He could hear the rifle shots, too, from the gallery in the garage where Bill was in charge. . . . He began to think that he could hear other sounds as well, blurred and very far away, but gradually and certainly always drawing nearer—the pattering of little hoofs along a gravel drive. . . . He smiled kindly at the patrons of the bran tub. He was very grateful and polite when tuppences were thrust into his hand. . . . He stayed for a long time, until the barrel was empty, and his brain began to swim in slow, rocking waves, above the roll of which the patter of hoofs was always plain." Luis remonstrates with him. "Making your house like an imitation zoo!" and Rowly confesses that the damage to the lawn "hurts."

This story is so versatile and has so much to charm that we should occupy too much space if we attempted to comment on the whole, but we cannot resist the following description.

"The cornfields were losing their gold in the grey of the dusk. There would be a moon after a while, and the big sheaves would look like gold ladies and their grooms setting to partners down their yellow isles."

The most delightful book we have read for a very long while.

H. H.

WORD FOR WEEK.

Service is one of the ways by which a tiny insect, like one of us, can get a purchase on the whole universe. If we find a job where we can be of use we are hitched to the star of the world and move with it.—*Cabot*.

To live is to talk with the world. Work, play, love and worship are four good ways of keeping up the conversation.—*Cabot*.

* By Constance Holme. Mills & Boon.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)