

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"SECRET BREAD."*

The story opens with a death-bed scene, coupled with a marriage.

"There was silence in the room where James Ruan lay in the great bed, awaiting his marriage and his death." At last he was about to make tardy reparation to the mother of his children. This, however, was not the motive for his decision.

"So you've not cheated me, James," the woman said. "I made sure to find 'ee dead when I brought the Passon—I thought you'd 'a done it to spite me."

"Dear woman," said the Squire, gently, "its for my own pleasure I'm wedding you, and not to make an honest woman of you. I've a fancy to have the old place carried on by one who has a right to my name, that's all."

"An' our first-born, Archelaus, can go begging all his days, suppose? An' t'other lads an' Vassie can go an' starve wi' en?"

Ruan's face changed, grew darker, and he spoke harshly.

"They were the children of our passion, true love children. They remind me of the days when I was a fool, and I leave them only my folly. But the child that's coming, he'll be blessed by the law and the church, quite a gentleman of quality, Annie; far above the likes of you. He'll live to breed hatred and malice in the pack of ye, and every hand of his own flesh and blood will be against him. . . . Parson, do your duty, and tie this holy knot—small harm in it, nothing can hold me long now."

With fumbling hands, Ruan slipped his signet ring on the ugly, coarse finger of the woman who was at last his wife.

That night Annie gave birth to the latest heir of the house of Ruan and in the grey of the dawning the Squire was gathered to his fathers. From this final act of the old Squire is elaborated the very powerful romance that follows.

The Squire's prophecy came true, as, indeed, it was bound to.

Young Ishmael had been left in the guardianship of Parson Boase, who is a delightful character. He ensured to the boy the education that would fit him for his position as Squire of Cloom. Neither his mother nor Archelaus ever forgave him for the trick that fate had played him, and in time Archelaus took diabolical revenge.

Ishmael was remarkable from his childhood—a dreamer, a devotee of the beautiful, but withal practical and fearless. He stands for an example of clean, straight manhood.

A great deal of the charm of the book lies in the fact that it is a Cornish story and written by one who evidently feels and loves the fascination of that delightful county.

The ceremony "crying the heck," of which we

can only quote a very scant description, will surely make readers long to read the rest.

A very old labourer, who bore the splendid name of Melchisedec Baragwaneth, went from sheaf to sheaf, picking out a handful of heavily bearded ears. He was stiff with his great age and the cruel rheumatism that is the doom of the field worker; and against the brass and leather of his boots the stubble whispered loudly. This bunch, when adorned with flowers, became the heck. Melchisedec bent slowly down holding the heck towards the ground, and all the labourers bowed over their billhooks. Still more slowly the old man straightened himself, raising his arms till he held the bunch of corn high over his head till he looked like some sylvan priest elevating the host.

It was at this ceremony that Parson Boase arranged young Ishmael's formal *début* as master, though he was as yet a young child.

Ishmael's return to take possession of his heritage, of necessity causes many heartburnings to his mother and elder brother, and the secretive vindictiveness of Archelaus is described by a master-pen.

He is the absolute reverse of his brother, having no regard to morals or clean living, and the writer does not scruple to deal quite plainly with the passions of men. Ishmael's marriage with Phoebe, the little rustic maid of the mill, although she was of an entirely alien disposition to himself, might have passed for a fairly happy one, if Archelaus had not chosen a dastardly plan of wreaking his long pent-up revenge on his brother. Phoebe died in giving birth to Nicky. Years after when Nicky was himself a father, Archelaus, on his dying bed, reveals to Ishmael that Nicky was the child of sin between himself and Phoebe, and that therefore Ishmael had no son to follow him.

"Aw what do 'ee think I did it for? It wasn for love I did it, it was for hate. Hate of 'ee, Ishmael.

"Cloom's been yours all your life, but when you and I are both rotting, it'll be I and not you who's living at Cloom. So 'tis mine, not yeurs, after all."

Some of the desolation of upright Ishmael is revealed as he watches the harvesting—"this inevitable flow, this deeply necessary procession of events—sowing, ripening, building and threshing must surely hold its counterpart in men's lives. . . . Or did they alone reap the whirlwind, and when the swirl of that was past, subside into formless dust?"

A story abounding with beautiful descriptions and arresting incident.

H. H.

WORD FOR THE WEEK.

I hold every man a debtor to his profession; from the which as men of course do seek to receive countenance and profit, so ought they of duty to endeavour themselves by way of amends to be a help and ornament thereunto. BACON.

* By T. Tennyson Jesse. (London: Heinemann).

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