

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

ROSSENAL.*

The publication of Mr. Raymond's previous book, "Tell England," is so recent and its result so successful that "Rossenal" needs no introduction from us.

This time the author describes the home life and somewhat abnormal character of a single boy, in contrast to the public school career of a group of boys that he so convincingly portrayed in his former work.

David Rossenal is in the invidious position of illegitimacy, and occupies the unusual position of the adopted child of his own father. He is also mothered by his mother's sister, Mrs. Macassa, who was paid handsomely by the General for her services, and who, it is hinted, was something more than a housekeeper to him.

So young David's upbringing admittedly was somewhat shady. Albeit the General was, on the surface, a charming, courtly man, who was devoted to the little son he did not acknowledge. "The three of them—the distinguished baronet, the lady of the house, and David Rossenal—would sit down to breakfast and maintain a ceremonial silence till Sir Gordon saw fit to utter such a remark as: "Koko, your guardian has neither butter nor marmalade. Always look after the ladies, and especially those who are so kind to you."

About nine o'clock, Mrs. Macassa, hardly looking up from her needle, said: "You must be going to bed now, David. (Was it so that she spoke more gently to him when Sir Gordon was present?)" And Sir Gordon, taking out his cigar-case, endorsed Mrs. Macassa's words.

"Yes, Koko, go to bed now. You've won. Surely never was there such a card-player. Good-night, Koko. Say your prayers and wash your teeth. Good-night, Mr. Koko"—adding, not very relevantly, "tell the truth and shame the devil."

David, knowing it was useless to linger longer, mounted to his bedroom and his nightly terrors.

David's history is so complicated that it would be hopeless to attempt to disentangle it for the reader in the short space at our disposal, but we cannot ignore so important a person as his mother, otherwise "Auntie Dora," otherwise Madame Chartreuse.

"Auntie" was a courtesy title. Some such intimate term seemed necessary, since everyone had decided that a beautiful affection existed between her and David Rossenal. Auntie Dora loved him to the extent of calling him her sweetheart, and David for his part certainly loved her much better than Mrs. Macassa.

Auntie Dora took Monsieur Chartreuse to husband in France—"picked up the leash and brought him behind her to England. She trotted him into drawing-rooms and explained his points as one might with a bull-pup."

Death called Sir Gordon urgently, and he passed away without making the provision for David that he had no doubt intended. David's dream of a

university career came to an end, and he endured for a time the ignominy of becoming a clerk in the Army and Navy Stores, where Sir Gordon had been a shareholder and honoured customer.

Later on, however, he became a junior tutor at a preparatory school, and once more he indulged in his dreams of becoming a writer.

David fell in love, early in life, with the sister of his pupil, Ivor Angus.

"A girl with her hair down her back rose from the settee and approached rather shyly: her hair was the auburn hair of Ivor, tied loosely with a maize-coloured bow, but breaking away from her ears in a sunny mist; her eyes were Ivor's eyes, though fringed with longer lashes. Her white dress, hanging close to a figure as spare as Ivor's, was unadorned save for a huge yellow rose at her waist. Her arms, white and bare, made David think of arum lilies."

A foolish wish seized him to stroke her hair. He suspected that something in him must always be hungry and unsatisfied till he had gathered that form into his arms and pressed it tightly to himself.

This youthful and charming romance grew and flourished. David, with admirable self-restraint in one so young, determined to accomplish something before he offered himself to the girl he loved.

He describes her to Mr. Aitch, his former tutor, who had been his salvation, as "she's rather nice, I think."

At this Mr. Aitch went off into such a roar of laughter as drew the heads of the coolies and camels towards them. (They were travelling in Persia at the time.)

David, much incensed, determined that if he wanted the full truth he should have it.

"Well, she's most like a daffodil. She's too soft for a yellow tulip; too uncommon for a buttercup; and not full-blown enough for a tea-rose."

"Goodness!" said Mr. Aitch.

"Well, you asked for it," said David, sulkily—but he went on to tell Mr. Aitch how he had resolved to achieve something before beseeching her hand.

Mr. Aitch replied by telling him he had created a work of art in which he believed. "That's the utmost a man can vow to—completed work—that's all that's asked of him. Victory ends there. The next things—applause, remuneration, and such—rest with the caprice of the gods. So if I were you I should go home and propose to this person."

"Would you, sir?" said David.

The darkness and quiet of the Eastern night seemed those of a mosque; the droning chatter of the coolies sounded like an orison.

David talked of the spots on his record and the tendencies in his character that were perverse, but he claimed to have worshipped two ideals and to have kept loyal to them: he had kept his art pure and himself virgin-bodied for his wife.

"Of course," murmured Mr. Aitch.

H. H.

* By Ernest Raymond. (Cassell & Co.)

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