

## BOOK OF THE WEEK.

## "THE FREELANDS."\*

This story is a pill disguised as a sweetmeat. There is just a thought too much of the pill, and not enough of the nice sugary coating. Not that we have a quarrel with novels with a purpose; far from it; but too much of the social problem in a work of fiction is apt to make it just a little tiresome. In these strenuous and nerve-racking times, we have a right to demand that our recreations shall be free from problems.

We have before us in "The Freeland," a tale of the tyranny of the landowner towards his humble tenants, and the justly expressed indignation of right-minded persons towards this attitude.

The Freeland family consisted of several branches of married brothers, some rather inclined to be something of cranks though only Tod is avowedly so. Of Felix we have the first glimpse as he was on his way from his house in Hampstead to his brother John's house in Porchester Gate. "He was conscious that the people passing him were distressingly plain, both men and women, plain with the particular plainness of those who are quite unaware of it. It struck him forcibly while he went along, how very queer it was that, with so many plain people in the country, the population managed to keep up even as well as it did."

Felix's object was to confer with two of his brothers, as to his fourth brother Tod's attitude to the Mallorings who owned all the land round about him. Said Stanley, "It doesn't do. They've fallen foul of the Mallorings over what they call injustice to some of the labourers."

They summed up Tod's inconvenient attitude, as owing to his being "so d—d unique."

Felix was deputed to journey down to the country and remonstrate with him.

Kirsteen, Tod's wife, is described seventeen years previously, as having a brown face and black hair, fiery grey eyes, eyes all light under black lashes, and such a strange smile, bare, brown, shapely arms and neck, in a shirt of rough creamy linen, and from under a bright blue skirt, bare brown shapely ankles and feet. The Kirsteen of the present date does not appear to have altered materially. Of late years she had become "rabid" over the land question.

The "Tods" were hand in glove with the cottagers.

Felix on his visit of investigation, first made the acquaintance of Tod's son and daughter. "They were a couple: strange, attractive, almost frightening; Kirsteen had brought his brother a formidable little brood."

Tod was cutting down a tree in the orchard when he caught sight of Felix, whom he had not seen for many years.

"Fancy," he said, "old Gladstone spending his leisure cutting down trees—of all melancholy

jobs." Then looking sorrowfully at the pear tree. "Seventy years, and down in seven minutes. Well it had to go."

His speech was slow like that of a man accustomed to think aloud. Felix admired him askance, "I might live next door," he thought "for all the notice he's taken of my turning up."

Tod looked at Felix.

"What have you come for, old man?"

Felix smiled. Quaint way to put it.

"For a talk," he said, but before he could pin Tod's attention it had wandered off again to his beloved nature study, and had become absorbed in the contemplation of a wren.

"Felix waited. Tod was getting awfully eccentric, living this queer out-of-the-way life year after year with a cranky woman, never reading anything, never seeing anyone but tramps, and animals and villagers. And yet, sitting there beside his eccentric brother, he had an extraordinary sense of rest. It was but perhaps the beauty and sweetness of the day with its dappling sunlight brightening the apple blossoms, the wind flowers, the wood sorrel, and in the blue sky above the fields those clouds so unimaginably white."

Amid such calm peace as this, Tod's family pursued the question of equality of right, with burning zeal, and with sympathetic passionate partisanship.

It was here that the hot-headed young brother and sister incited the labourer Tryst to revolt against this arbitrary eviction from his cottage, which resulted in his committal for trial for arson and a subsequent sentence of three years' penal servitude. Poor fellow, he shortened the sentence by tragic suicide. Mr. Galsworthy evidently feels keenly the wrongs of the working classes, and he is much to be admired for expressing this so ably and forcibly. But having unburdened himself of this duty, we hope that at no far-off date he will repeat the delights of such works as his "Man of Property," and "The Country House."

H. H.

## COMING EVENTS.

*February 12th.*—The National Council of Trained Nurses of Great Britain and Ireland. General Meeting of Members to consider a Circular Letter, addressed by the Hon. Arthur Stanley, M.P., Chairman of the Joint War Committee to Committees of Hospitals, proposing a voluntary scheme for the organisation of Nursing Education and the Control of the Nursing Profession. Large Hall, Royal Society of Medicine, 1, Wimpole Street, London, W. 4 p.m. Trained Nurses who are not members of affiliated societies can obtain tickets from Hon. Sec., 431, Oxford Street, London, W.

*February 14th.*—Her Majesty the Queen unveils the Medallion Memorial to Florence Nightingale in the Crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral. 2.15 p.m.

\* By John Galsworthy. William Heinemann, London.

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