

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"FRAILITY."*

"What is there hid in the heart of a rose? . . .
 Ah! who knows, who knows, who knows?
 A man that died on a lonely hill
 May tell you, perhaps, but none other will. . .
 What does it take to make a rose? . . .
 The God that died to make it knows.
 It takes the world's eternal wars,
 It takes the moon and all the stars,
 It takes the might of Heaven and hell
 And the everlasting love as well." . . .
 —Alfred Noyes.

This book touches the high-water mark of excellence from many points of view.

It is without doubt a great literary achievement, and shows a versatility and a freshness of conception which it is not often the privilege of the novel lover to enjoy.

"Little Charles's mother easily looked tragic and beautiful.

She had looked like that when his father had seen her first, followed her and spoken to her, though he knew no Italian and she no English, and finally married her.

He belonged to the Ley clan—that body of gypsies which knows the ancient rites and lives by them, and even when it traffics with the world, scorns the easy dupes, who pay so easily. He died as he would have wished to die, in the heart of a storm that swept the blue bay to blackest frenzy."

Felice mourned him steadily, and with the winter began to forget a little.

She had an offer to sing in a touring company. She had always sung; she did it as easily as others say "good morning."

She saw clearly she must get rid of little Charles.

Marie Ley, his gipsy grandmother, met him at Plymouth. She lifted his hat from his head, he looked up at her, her heart melted into tears; the same little dark head that had lain on her heart was before her, the same dark eyes gazed back into her eyes into which she had gazed so often in the person of her son.

Marie Ley knelt before him, very upright, her black eyes on his; she laid one cool, thin hand on his shoulder. "This is a temple," she said to him, "your body, little son of my heart; never forget it, keep it always very clean and let the wind sweep its fingers through your hair."

"*Non compisco*," said little Charles.

The account of the death of the old gipsy, when Charles was a big lad, is a beautiful piece of writing. She breathed her last on the moorland she loved.

"Get me out into the open."

Charles lifted her easily and bore her down on to the moor, wrapped in the blanket from her narrow bed.

"I'm dying," she said; "bend down, son of my heart. My bonny! Mind now you keep some of that stuff for your cold always by you, and Charles, never sell the old horse."

"Not me," he gulped.

"I think that's all," she said; "I have loved things, Charles. There's a scent like apple blossoms on the breeze now; it hasn't a scent, really the blossom, but there's the breath of every spring-time that ever comes with it."

Charles cried out and then stifled his cry.

Among her possessions Charles found some white powder with a sentence written on the paper: "For dear Solomon, if he gets too old when I am not here."

Charles gave it to the old horse between the two halves of an apple. The old horse had missed Marie, he had always wondered why she did not come.

"He was glad to rest; the spring had tired him exceedingly, he would have liked to be glad in it. He nibbled at the grass before him; Charles put his hand upon him, and he liked to feel it there. He fell asleep at last, still ruminating, rather missing the jolt of his old caravan behind him and the clink of the harness. But he missed Marie most of all."

Charles seeks out his mother, who is now a famous singer in London, and through her meets a man who was the baneful influence of his life, an old admirer of her own. It would be difficult to outdo the sinister character of Beverley.

He had, a short time previously, been mauled tiger-shooting, which had rendered him a helpless cripple, and had embittered what must have always been a heartless character. He takes a cynical fancy to Charles and offers to take him as a travelling companion.

Two more incongruous companions it would be difficult to imagine—the *blasé* man about town and the unsophisticated gipsy lad, handsome in form but rude of speech. But Charles, if unsophisticated, had his full share of sturdy independence and shrewdness, and in the end proved a match for his patron.

Beverley introduces the lad to the delirious delight of cocaine inhaling, Charles' serious condition after a fight lending the excuse. This part of the book is very skilfully told and the awful effects of the drug are described.

Though the boy succumbs for a while, his sturdy force of character, built up among folk of clean living, asserts itself, and after a hard struggle he shakes himself free, denouncing Beverley in front of his friends in the hotel, before he leaves.

Years later, while still in the twenties, he built up a huge fortune as a railway expert in America and returns to England and marries the beautiful Diana, daughter of Lord Wreford. So far from the story ending here, it leads up to the real tragedy of Charles' life.

His adored Diana has inherited a craving for alcohol, though at infrequent intervals:

"There are many characters in this book of

* By Olive Wadsley. London: Cassell & Co.

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