

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"WASTRALLS."*

Cornwall is always associated with romance, and brings with it an atmosphere of primitive men and women. This story brings out the flavour of that fascinating county, and has an additional attraction in its originality and dramatic force. That it is also creepy and even gruesome in parts is a natural outcome when one remembers that the Cornish are a race that is superstitious and imaginative to a high degree.

There are some priceless characters in this volume, and we venture to think that Sabina is a creation. We do not remember to have met her before, and certainly it would be unwise for anyone to attempt to re-dish her up in any future story. The pattern should be destroyed, she is quite unique.

Sabina was the vital bright-haired child of a vague, colourless mother, who died shortly after her birth. For lack of a son, Freathy had taken his daughter with him about the farm. By the time he died she had gathered a little store of experience, had indeed been farming Wastralls for over a year.

"Freathy, intending to re-marry and leave hearty sons, had not troubled to make a will, and the girl of one-and-twenty succeeded to an unencumbered freehold of five hundred acres, the manor house and what remained of the old Squire's savings." As the neighbours said "to give the maid her due, hers a first-rate farmer."

When Byron Leadville, the waif, washed up by the sea, but reared in the immediate neighbourhood of Wastralls, returned from his voyaging, he found that Sabina, big, fair, ripe, a woman who might have stepped out of an Elizabethan age reigned at Wastralls.

In outward seeming the man was not unlike the people among whom he lived. A little more swarthy, with a more sombre expression in his dark eyes, a broader chest than was often seen, he might have passed for a Cornishman. The difference was one of temperament, and the difference was so great that never to the end of his life was he to be other to them than a "foreigner."

It was not Sabina that he wanted but Wastralls. "Asking no more than to spend his passion on the land he found consent in Sabina's awakening interest."

After he was safely married to her he had the surprise of his life. Sabina flatly refused to allow him to farm the land.

"What's the good to let you 'ave it, you dunno nothing about farmin'. Yo bin to sea most all yer life."

"'Avin married you, the farm's my due."

Sabina sat very straight in her chair. "Now once for all," said she, "let's settle this matter. Wastralls is mine, and I dare you to so much as lay a finger on it."

* By C. A. Dawson-Scott. London: Heinemann.

Byron's surprise at her attitude was so intense that he stared at her in helpless silence, until she clinched the matter by saying in her hearty, fresh-air voice, "'Tis no good for ye to think any more about it."

He entreated, she smiled; he blustered, she laughed; he cajoled, she warmed to him, but though she warmed she did not weaken."

The break up of the situation was due to an accident.

Sabina was thrown from a trap, and her injuries were so severe as to necessitate the amputation of both legs.

But if Byron imagined that this was to be the end of Sabina's activities he was doomed to disappointment. She invented for her use a self-propelling trolley, and on this made a triumphant return to the farm, for she was much respected and beloved by the neighbourhood.

Byron lifted his eyes as the beflowered cortège rolled into the yard. The trolley, with its basket work cone, was an unpleasant surprise; while his wife, in brightly-coloured gown and pink sun bonnet, swelling out of it like some monstrous fruit, completed his dismay. She was a figure of fun, a queer oddity, repellent as something out of Nature, Sabina had returned to farm her land with undaunted will if with diminished activities.

We are not disposed to retail the "creepy" parts for our readers, but we can promise them that if they read the book for themselves they will be glad of a candle to "light them to bed."

But we cannot conclude without a reference to dear Mrs. Tom, a delightful woman, Sabina's life-long friend and kinswoman, and the mother of a long "tail" of pretty girls.

"Wastralls" is a work of high literary merit and a story of unusual power that everyone should read.

H. H.

OUTSIDE THE GATES.

The Qualification of Women Bill, which was contained in one clause, passed its second reading in the House of Commons on Monday night without a division, giving a woman, married or single, the same right as a man to sit in the House of Commons.

Lord Robert Cecil, who was in charge of the Bill, confessed that he was in favour of its being extended to the House of Lords, but he indicated technical difficulties which might make such a clause prejudice its chances.

There are now twenty peeresses in their own right, and we have no doubt they will soon grace the crimson benches in their "Lordships' House."

A WORD FOR THE WEEK.

"Political liberty is a part of the whole. Liberty is the development of the personality along moral lines towards moral ideas, the setting free, in each individual and throughout the State, of a great flood of creative energy."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)