

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"THIS FREEDOM."*

We expect much of the brilliant author of "If Winter Comes," and, assuredly, the critics notwithstanding, "This Freedom" will add to his fame. In our view it surpasses "If Winter Comes," and must rank as one of the great novels of the year for its literary merit, its deep penetration, and its wonderful presentment of its subject.

Rosalie Aubyn, the youngest of her family by some years, was the child of a country clergyman, and a sweet, gentle, mother with the early Victorian outlook on life. Her father had been a Wrangler, and one of the most brilliant men of his year at Cambridge. All manner of brilliance was expected for him, and of him. He unexpectedly went into the Church, and as unexpectedly married, while on a holiday, the daughter of a clergyman, a widower, who kept a small private school in Devonshire. Thereupon the rosy prospects terminated. The brilliant Wrangler found himself unexpectedly the assistant master in his father-in-law's second-rate and failing school. The daughter would not leave her father, the suitor would not leave his darling.

When his father-in-law died he awoke characteristically. The old man dead! Now that was one burden lifted, one shackle removed. The school finally went smash at the same time. Never mind! Another burden gone. How he hated the school, how he loathed and abominated it. Now a fresh start! Hurrah!

That was Rosalie's father—in those days. He always jumped blindly and wildly into things. Blindly and wildly into the Church, blindly and wildly into marriage, blindly and wildly into the school, blindly and wildly, one might say, into fatherhood on a lavish scale. Blindly and wildly—the magnificent fresh start—into the rectory in which Rosalie was born.

Life at the Rectory revolved round the male members of it, and indeed Rosalie's earliest apprehension of the world was of a mysterious and extraordinary world that revolved entirely about her father, and that entirely and completely belonged to her father. So when on one occasion she saw her father chased by a bull she was not in the least alarmed, only, as always, enthralled. To see a woman rushing before a bull would have alarmed Rosalie, for she would have felt it was unnatural; but for her father to be wildly bounding along in front of a bull seemed perfectly natural and ordinary. . . . The world was his and the fulness thereof, and he did what he liked with it. She merely remarked, "Mother says dinner is waiting for you, father."

"Her mother—her mother and her sisters and the servants and the entire female establishment of the universe—seemed to Rosalie always to be waiting for something from her father, or for her

father himself, or waiting for or upon some male other than her father. That was another of the leading principles that Rosalie first came to know in her world. Not only were the males able to do what they liked, and always doing wonderful and mysterious things, but everything that the females did either had some relation to a male, or was directly for, about, or on behalf of a male.

"Getting Robert off to school in the morning, for instance, was another early picture.

"There would be Robert eating, and the entire female population of the Rectory feverishly attending upon Robert while he ate. Six females, intensely, and as if their lives depended upon it, occupied with one male—all exhaustingly occupied in pushing out of the house one heavy and obstinate male aged about ten."

And following on Robert, Harold; Harold in great heat and hurry (as men always were) with his splendid button boots in one hand and an immense pair of shining cuffs in the other hand. Harold wrangling with and bullying Robert, his father bullying Harold; but the males of the family paramount always. The females negligible and adoring.

Rosalie's mother, whose name had been Anna Escott, kept at the bottom of a drawer five most exquisite little miniatures. They were in a case of faded blue plush, and they had been in that case, and at the bottom of one drawer or another ever since the girl Anna Escott, aged twenty, had placed them in the case, then exquisitely blue and new and soft, and given up painting miniatures for ever, in order to devote her whole time to looking after her invalid father and the failing preparatory school that was his livelihood.

It was inevitable that with Rosalie observant, and sharp at making deductions, the pendulum should swing far the other way. She declined at the conclusion of her school days to adopt the obvious rôle of teacher; figures and finance enthralled her, and she made good in Lombard Street. When she married she was a happy, loving, and devoted wife, an adoring mother, her house faultlessly managed, her children well cared for, and yet disaster befel, and the moral—for the book has a moral—is that she should have given up her place in the world of finance for which she had real talent, and devoted herself exclusively to her husband and children. And yet is the deduction quite fair? The stay-at-home women is often an incompetent drone, a thoughtless butterfly, demanding everything, giving little. Opinions will be sharply divergent, but certain it is that those mothers have their reward who do not hand over their children to governesses and nursemaids when they are small, but themselves guide them in the way they should go, and are closely, intimately associated with the ordering of their lives, the recipients of their confidences, the sharers of their joys and sorrows. The price paid for freedom may be too high.

* By A. S. M. Hutchinson. (Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd.)

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