

BOOK OF THE MONTH.

"THE SWAN SONG."*

Lovers of the Forsytes—and they must be many—will close the covers of this book with a feeling akin to personal loss, for, as its title denotes, it is the last chronicle of that Victorian family representative of the prosperous middle class, which, in spite of lack of charm or conspicuous nobility of character, has contrived to establish itself in an extraordinary way in the imagination of the intelligent public.

We are aware that at least one of our contemporaries has expressed itself relieved that Mr. Galsworthy has at last concluded this long history of four generations of Forsytes which began in the Saga and has closed with "The Swan Song." We cannot share its opinion, and our condolences are with Mr. Galsworthy who, in the death of Soames, must feel lonesome and bereft of his old crony.

The Saga commenced in the year 1886, and the death of Soames occurred in the present day. If any of our readers are not acquainted with the history of this family they should hasten to repair their loss. Soames, we remember, or should do, was one of the older generation, who divorced his adored and beautiful Irene and married Annette, a Frenchwoman, who merely figures in these pages as the mother of his daughter Fleur.

A pathetic figure, Soames, obstinately clinging to the prestige of past days which he sees disappearing with bewildering swiftness in these democratic times. Fleur, a typical modern product, with her easy morality—an alarming contrast to Aunts Ann, Juley and Hester—is married now to Michael Mont and mother of Kit, yet scheming in her wilful brain to win back her old lover, Jon. What a problem she was to Soames, and how the lonely man loved her!

In his beautiful house on the river, awaiting her coming on the morrow, we have one of Mr. Galsworthy's beautiful little nature studies.

"After his lonely dinner he lit a cigar and strolled out. It was really warm for May and still light enough for him to see the cows beyond the river. They would soon be sheltering for the night under that hawthorn hedge. The river was whitening; the dusk seemed held in the trees, waiting to spread and fly up into a sky just drained of sunset. Very peaceful and a little eerie the hour between. The starlings made a racket—disagreeable beggars. The swallows went by, taking 'night caps' of gnats and early moths; and the poplars stood so still—as if listening—that Soames put up his hand to feel for a breeze. Not a breath! And Soames thought: 'Hope to goodness there'll be no mysteries when she comes down to-morrow. I don't want to be worried! Just she and the little chap. How pleasant it might be if that old love trouble, with its gnarled roots in the past and bitter fruits in the future, were not present to cast a gloom.'"

Then Soames the collector . . .

"Next morning he went up to his picture gallery and unhooked from the wall a little Watteau which he had once heard Fleur admire. He took it downstairs and put it on an easel in her bedroom—a young man in full plum-coloured skirts and lace ruffles, playing a tambourine to a young lady in blue with a bare bosom behind a pet lamb. Charming thing! She could take it when she went and hang it with the Fragonards and Chardin in her drawing-room.

He stood presently in front of the flowers the gardener had brought in—among them three special early roses. He took up one and sniffed it deeply. So many different

kinds, he had lost track! In his young days one could tell them—La France, Maréchal Niel, and Gloire de Dijon—nothing else to speak of. You never heard of *them* now. And at this reminder of the mutability of flowers and the ingenuity of human beings, Soames felt slightly exhausted. There was no end to things.

Fleur's voice roused him. She bent her face forward for a kiss, and her eyes looked beyond him. Soames put his lips on the edge of her cheek bone. She was away somewhere. 'She's not thinking of me. Why should she? She's young!'

The circumstances of Soames' death will appeal to the imagination of all collectors.

"A fire in the picture gallery. Good God! The flames were licking at his Fred Walker and the two David Cox's. The Constable! For a moment he hesitated. The Alfred Stevens! By heavens he was not going to lose his Stevens nor his Gauguins nor his Corots. A sort of demon entered into Soames. His taste, his trouble, his money, and his pride, all consumed? By heavens, No!

"How he fought for his treasures. There they went pitching down into the blanket beneath. What a way to treat them!

"Better go down, sir! It's gettin' a bit thick now."

"No!" said Soames. "Come on!"

Half carrying, half dragging, he bore the Spanish effigy of Fleur to the window.

"Come away there," called a voice from the doorway. He came to himself on a chair in the verandah. He felt drugged, drowsy, triumphant, in spite of his aches and smarting. His poor pictures! But he had saved them! They'd save the rest.

He stumbled up to the foreman. "Not that wall. You'll spoil my pictures." The "Vendemic." Dislodged by the stream of water it was tilting forward.

"It's falling!" he cried. "Look out! Look out!"

He pushed Fleur forward with outstretched arms and fell.

"The thing had struck him to the earth."

The concluding chapters are crowded with imaginative description—Old Gradnam, clerk to the Forsyte firm of solicitors for half a century, prays for his old master that he may be delivered from "all 'ardness of 'eart before he goes 'ence, and make him a little lamb again," and sitting with a handkerchief over his bald head, reviews his experiences of the family.

Fleur, sitting beside her father's dying bed, is torn by remorse that she had withheld the love from him that he yearned for.

"He seemed to abandon all effort to speak, and centred all the life of him in his eyes. Deeper and deeper grew the colour and the form and the meaning in them as if to compel something from her. And suddenly like a little girl she said: 'Yes, Dad! I will be good!'

A tremor passed from his fingers into her palm, and always that look deepened in his eyes. Again she felt the tremor and saw his lips whispering.

'That's all.'

And suddenly his eyes went out."

Sir Lawrence came to the funeral.

"I respected old Forsyte," he said, when they returned on foot from the churchyard where, in a corner selected by himself, Soames now lay under a crab-apple tree.

"He dated, and he couldn't express himself. There was no humbug about him—an honest man. Who was the old chap who cried into his hat?"

"Old Gradnam—a sort of business nurse to the family."

"Faithful old dog! Well, I certainly never thought Forsyte would take the ferry before me."

Fleur fulfilled her promise to "be good."

* By John Galsworthy. (Heinemann, Ltd.)

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