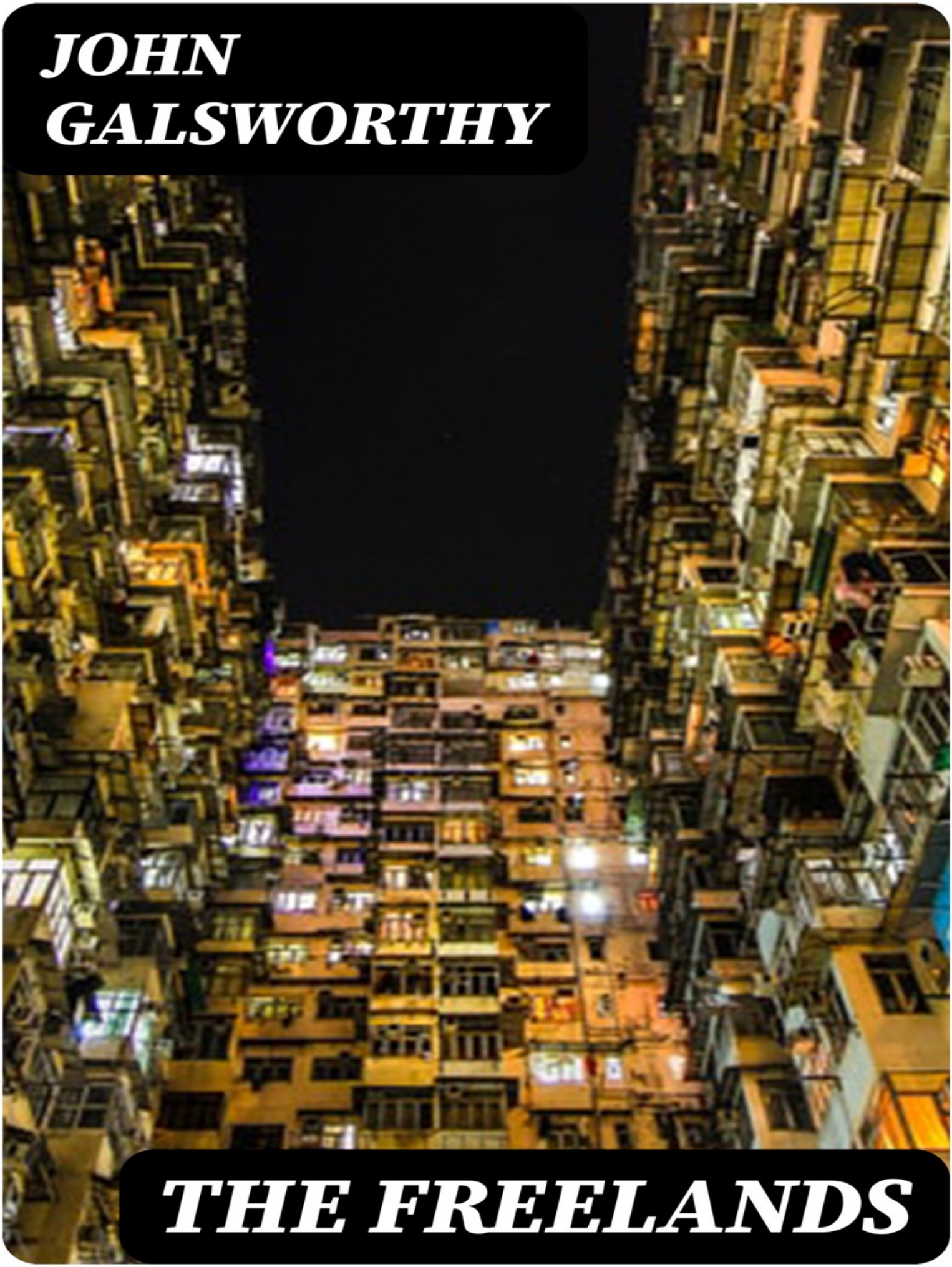
JOHN GALSWORTHY



THE FREELANDS

John Galsworthy

The Freelands

EAN 8596547330011

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

Mayday afternoon in Oxford Street, and Felix Freeland, a little late, on his way from Hampstead to his brother John's house in Porchester Gardens. Felix Freeland, author, wearing the very first gray top hat of the season. A compromise, that—like many other things in his life and works—between individuality and the accepted view of things, aestheticism and fashion, the critical sense and authority. After the meeting at John's, to discuss the doings of the family of his brother Morton Freeland—better known as Tod—he would perhaps look in on the caricatures at the English Gallery, and visit one duchess in Mayfair, concerning the George Richard Memorial. And so, not the soft felt hat which really suited authorship, nor the black top hat which obliterated personality to the point of pain, but this gray thing with narrowish black band, very suitable, in truth, to a face of a pale buff color, to a moustache of a deep buff color streaked with a few gray hairs, to a black braided coat cut away from a buff-colored waistcoat, to his neat boots—not patent leather—faintly buffed with May-day dust. Even his eyes, Freeland gray, were a little buffed over by sedentary habit, and the number of things that he was conscious of. For instance, that the people passing him were distressingly plain, both men and women; plain with the particular plainness of those 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. To his wonderfully keen

sense of defect, it seemed little short of marvellous. A shambling, shoddy crew, this crowd of shoppers and labor demonstrators! A conglomeration of hopelessly mediocre visages! What was to be done about it? Ah! what indeed!—since they were evidently not aware of their own dismal mediocrity. Hardly a beautiful or a vivid face, hardly a wicked one, never anything transfigured, passionate, terrible, or grand. Nothing Greek, early Italian, Elizabethan, not even beefy, beery, broad old Georgian. Something clutched-in, and squashed-out about it all—on that collective face something of the look of a man almost comfortably and warmly wrapped round by a snake at the very beginning of its squeeze. It gave Felix Freeland a sort of faint excitement and pleasure to notice this. For it was his business to notice things, and embalm them afterward in ink. And he believed that not many people noticed it, so that it contributed in his mind to his own distinction, which was precious to him. Precious, and encouraged to be so by the press, which—as he well knew—must print his name several thousand times a year. And yet, as a man of culture and of principle, how he despised that kind of fame, and theoretically believed that a man's real distinction lay in his oblivion of the world's opinion, particularly as expressed by that flighty creature, the Fourth Estate. But here again, as in the matter of the gray top hat, he had instinctively compromised, taking in press cuttings which described himself and his works, while he never failed to describe those descriptions—good, bad, and indifferent—as 'that stuff,' and their writers as 'those fellows.'

Not that it was new to him to feel that the country was in a bad way. On the contrary, it was his established belief, and one for which he was prepared to furnish due and proper reasons. In the first place he traced it to the horrible hold Industrialism had in the last hundred years laid on the nation, draining the peasantry from 'the Land'; and in the second place to the influence of a narrow and insidious Officialism, sapping the independence of the People.

This was why, in going to a conclave with his brother John, high in Government employ, and his brother Stanley, a captain of industry, possessor of the Morton Plough Works, he was conscious of a certain superiority in that he, at all events, had no hand in this paralysis which was creeping on the country.

And getting more buff-colored every minute, he threaded his way on, till, past the Marble Arch, he secured the elbow-room of Hyde Park. Here groups of young men, with chivalrous idealism, were jeering at and chivying the broken remnants of a suffrage meeting. Felix debated whether he should oppose his body to their bodies, his tongue to theirs, or whether he should avert his consciousness and hurry on; but, that instinct which moved him to wear the gray top hat prevailing, he did neither, and stood instead, looking at them in silent anger, which quickly provoked endearments—such as: “Take it off,” or “Keep it on,” or “What cheer, Toppy!” but nothing more acute. And he meditated: Culture! Could culture ever make headway among the blind partisanships, the hand-to-mouth mentality, the cheap excitements of this town life? The faces of these youths, the tone of their voices, the very look of their bowler hats, said:

No! You could not culturalize the impermeable texture of their vulgarity. And they were the coming manhood of the nation—this inexpressibly distasteful lot of youths! The country had indeed got too far away from 'the Land.' And this essential towny commonness was not confined to the classes from which these youths were drawn. He had even remarked it among his own son's school and college friends—an impatience of discipline, an insensibility to everything but excitement and having a good time, a permanent mental indigestion due to a permanent diet of tit-bits. What aspiration they possessed seemed devoted to securing for themselves the plums of official or industrial life. His boy Alan, even, was infected, in spite of home influences and the atmosphere of art in which he had been so sedulously soaked. He wished to enter his Uncle Stanley's plough works, seeing in it a 'soft thing.'

But the last of the woman-baiters had passed by now, and, conscious that he was really behind time, Felix hurried on....

In his study—a pleasant room, if rather tidy—John Freeland was standing before the fire smoking a pipe and looking thoughtfully at nothing. He was, in fact, thinking, with that continuity characteristic of a man who at fifty has won for himself a place of permanent importance in the Home Office. Starting life in the Royal Engineers, he still preserved something of a military look about his figure, and grave visage with steady eyes and drooping moustache (both a shade grayer than those of Felix), and a forehead bald from justness and knowing where to lay his hand on papers. His face was thinner, his head narrower, than his

brother's, and he had acquired a way of making those he looked at doubt themselves and feel the sudden instability of all their facts. He was—as has been said—thinking. His brother Stanley had wired to him that morning: “Am motoring up to-day on business; can you get Felix to come at six o'clock and talk over the position at Tod's?” What position at Tod's? He had indeed heard something vague—of those youngsters of Tod's, and some fuss they were making about the laborers down there. He had not liked it. Too much of a piece with the general unrest, and these new democratic ideas that were playing old Harry with the country! For in his opinion the country was in a bad way, partly owing to Industrialism, with its rotting effect upon physique; partly to this modern analytic Intellectualism, with its destructive and anarchic influence on morals. It was difficult to overestimate the mischief of those two factors; and in the approaching conference with his brothers, one of whom was the head of an industrial undertaking, and the other a writer, whose books, extremely modern, he never read, he was perhaps vaguely conscious of his own cleaner hands. Hearing a car come to a halt outside, he went to the window and looked out. Yes, it was Stanley!...

Stanley Freeland, who had motored up from Becket—his country place, close to his plough works in Worcestershire—stood a moment on the pavement, stretching his long legs and giving directions to his chauffeur. He had been stopped twice on the road for not-exceeding the limit as he believed, and was still a little ruffled. Was it not his invariable principle to be moderate in speed as in all other things? And his feeling at the moment was stronger even than usual,

that the country was in a bad way, eaten up by officialism, with its absurd limitations of speed and the liberty of the subject, and the advanced ideas of these new writers and intellectuals, always talking about the rights and sufferings of the poor. There was no progress along either of those roads. He had it in his heart, as he stood there on the pavement, to say something pretty definite to John about interference with the liberty of the subject, and he wouldn't mind giving old Felix a rap about his precious destructive doctrines, and continual girding at the upper classes, vested interests, and all the rest of it. If he had something to put in their place that would be another matter. Capital and those who controlled it were the backbone of the country—what there was left of the country, apart from these d—d officials and aesthetic fellows! And with a contraction of his straight eyebrows above his straight gray eyes, straight blunt nose, blunter moustaches, and blunt chin, he kept a tight rein on his blunt tongue, not choosing to give way even to his own anger.

Then, perceiving Felix coming—'in a white topper, by Jove!'—he crossed the pavement to the door; and, tall, square, personable, rang the bell.

CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

“Well, what's the matter at Tod's?”

And Felix moved a little forward in his chair, his eyes fixed with interest on Stanley, who was about to speak.

“It's that wife of his, of course. It was all very well so long as she confined herself to writing, and talk, and that Land Society, or whatever it was she founded, the one that snuffed out the other day; but now she's getting herself and those two youngsters mixed up in our local broils, and really I think Tod's got to be spoken to.”

“It's impossible for a husband to interfere with his wife's principles.” So Felix.

“Principles!” The word came from John.

“Certainly! Kirsteen's a woman of great character; revolutionary by temperament. Why should you expect her to act as you would act yourselves?”

When Felix had said that, there was a silence.

Then Stanley muttered: “Poor old Tod!”

Felix sighed, lost for a moment in his last vision of his youngest brother. It was four years ago now, a summer evening—Tod standing between his youngsters Derek and Sheila, in a doorway of his white, black-timbered, creepered cottage, his sunburnt face and blue eyes the serenest things one could see in a day's march!

“Why 'poor'?” he said. “Tod's much happier than we are. You've only to look at him.”

“Ah!” said Stanley suddenly. “D'you remember him at Father's funeral?—without his hat, and his head in the

clouds. Fine-lookin' chap, old Tod—pity he's such a child of Nature."

Felix said quietly:

"If you'd offered him a partnership, Stanley—it would have been the making of him."

"Tod in the plough works? My hat!"

Felix smiled. At sight of that smile, Stanley grew red, and John refilled his pipe. It is always the devil to have a brother more sarcastic than oneself!

"How old are those two?" John said abruptly.

"Sheila's twenty, Derek nineteen."

"I thought the boy was at an agricultural college?"

"Finished."

"What's he like?"

"A black-haired, fiery fellow, not a bit like Tod."

John muttered: "That's her Celtic blood. Her father, old Colonel Moray, was just that sort; by George, he was a regular black Highlander. What's the trouble exactly?"

It was Stanley who answered: "That sort of agitation business is all very well until it begins to affect your neighbors; then it's time it stopped. You know the Mallorings who own all the land round Tod's. Well, they've fallen foul of the Mallorings over what they call injustice to some laborers. Questions of morality involved. I don't know all the details. A man's got notice to quit over his deceased wife's sister; and some girl or other in another cottage has kicked over—just ordinary country incidents. What I want is that Tod should be made to see that his family mustn't quarrel with his nearest neighbors in this way. We know the Mallorings well, they're only seven miles from us at Becket.

It doesn't do; sooner or later it plays the devil all round. And the air's full of agitation about the laborers and 'the Land,' and all the rest of it—only wants a spark to make real trouble."

And having finished this oration, Stanley thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and jingled the money that was there.

John said abruptly:

"Felix, you'd better go down."

Felix was sitting back, his eyes for once withdrawn from his brothers' faces.

"Odd," he said, "really odd, that with a perfectly unique person like Tod for a brother, we only see him once in a blue moon."

"It's because he IS so d—d unique."

Felix got up and gravely extended his hand to Stanley.

"By Jove," he said, "you've spoken truth." And to John he added: "Well, I WILL go, and let you know the upshot."

When he had departed, the two elder brothers remained for some moments silent, then Stanley said:

"Old Felix is a bit tryin'! With the fuss they make of him in the papers, his head's swelled!"

John did not answer. One could not in so many words resent one's own brother being made a fuss of, and if it had been for something real, such as discovering the source of the Black River, conquering Bechuanaland, curing Blue-mange, or being made a Bishop, he would have been the first and most loyal in his appreciation; but for the sort of thing Felix made up—Fiction, and critical, acid, destructive sort of stuff, pretending to show John Freeland things that he hadn't seen before—as if Felix could!—not at all the jolly old

romance which one could read well enough and enjoy till it sent you to sleep after a good day's work. No! that Felix should be made a fuss of for such work as that really almost hurt him. It was not quite decent, violating deep down one's sense of form, one's sense of health, one's traditions. Though he would not have admitted it, he secretly felt, too, that this fuss was dangerous to his own point of view, which was, of course, to him the only real one. And he merely said:

“Will you stay to dinner, Stan?”

CHAPTER III

Table of Contents

If John had those sensations about Felix, so—when he was away from John—had Felix about himself. He had never quite grown out of the feeling that to make himself conspicuous in any way was bad form. In common with his three brothers he had been through the mills of gentility—those unique grinding machines of education only found in his native land. Tod, to be sure, had been publicly sacked at the end of his third term, for climbing on to the headmaster's roof and filling up two of his chimneys with football pants, from which he had omitted to remove his name. Felix still remembered the august scene—the horrid thrill of it, the ominous sound of that: “Freeland minimus!” the ominous sight of poor little Tod emerging from his obscurity near the roof of the Speech Room, and descending all those steps. How very small and rosy he had looked, his bright hair standing on end, and his little blue eyes staring up very hard from under a troubled frown. And the august hand holding up those sooty pants, and the august voice: “These appear to be yours, Freeland minimus. Were you so good as to put them down my chimneys?” And the little piping, “Yes, sir.”

“May I ask why, Freeland minimus?”

“I don't know, sir.”

“You must have had some reason, Freeland minimus?”

“It was the end of term, sir.”

“Ah! You must not come back here, Freeland minimus. You are too dangerous, to yourself, and others. Go to your

place.”

And poor little Tod ascending again all those steps, cheeks more terribly rosy than ever, eyes bluer, from under a still more troubled frown; little mouth hard set; and breathing so that you could hear him six forms off. True, the new Head had been goaded by other outrages, the authors of which had not omitted to remove their names; but the want of humor, the amazing want of humor! As if it had not been a sign of first-rate stuff in Tod! And to this day Felix remembered with delight the little bubbling hiss that he himself had started, squelched at once, but rippling out again along the rows like tiny scattered lines of fire when a conflagration is suppressed. Expulsion had been the salvation of Tod! Or—his damnation? Which? God would know, but Felix was not certain. Having himself been fifteen years acquiring 'Mill' philosophy, and another fifteen years getting rid of it, he had now begun to think that after all there might be something in it. A philosophy that took everything, including itself, at face value, and questioned nothing, was sedative to nerves too highly strung by the continual examination of the insides of oneself and others, with a view to their alteration. Tod, of course, having been sent to Germany after his expulsion, as one naturally would be, and then put to farming, had never properly acquired 'Mill' manner, and never sloughed it off; and yet he was as sedative a man as you could meet.

Emerging from the Tube station at Hampstead, he moved toward home under a sky stranger than one might see in a whole year of evenings. Between the pine-trees on the ridge it was opaque and colored like pinkish stone, and all around

violent purple with flames of the young green, and white spring blossom lit against it. Spring had been dull and unimaginative so far, but this evening it was all fire and gathered torrents; Felix wondered at the waiting passion of that sky.

He reached home just as those torrents began to fall.

The old house, beyond the Spaniard's Road, save for mice and a faint underlying savor of wood-rot in two rooms, well satisfied the aesthetic sense. Felix often stood in his hall, study, bedroom, and other apartments, admiring the rich and simple glow of them—admiring the rarity and look of studied negligence about the stuffs, the flowers, the books, the furniture, the china; and then quite suddenly the feeling would sweep over him: “By George, do I really own all this, when my ideal is 'bread and water, and on feast days a little bit of cheese'?” True, he was not to blame for the niceness of his things—Flora did it; but still—there they were, a little hard to swallow for an epicurean. It might, of course, have been worse, for if Flora had a passion for collecting, it was a very chaste one, and though what she collected cost no little money, it always looked as if it had been inherited, and—as everybody knows—what has been inherited must be put up with, whether it be a coronet or a cruet-stand.

To collect old things, and write poetry! It was a career; one would not have one's wife otherwise. She might, for instance, have been like Stanley's wife, Clara, whose career was wealth and station; or John's wife, Anne, whose career had been cut short; or even Tod's wife, Kirsteen, whose career was revolution. No—a wife who had two, and only

two children, and treated them with affectionate surprise, who was never out of temper, never in a hurry, knew the points of a book or play, could cut your hair at a pinch; whose hand was dry, figure still good, verse tolerable, and—above all—who wished for no better fate than Fate had given her—was a wife not to be sneezed at. And Felix never had. He had depicted so many sneezing wives and husbands in his books, and knew the value of a happy marriage better perhaps than any one in England. He had laid marriage low a dozen times, wrecked it on all sorts of rocks, and had the greater veneration for his own, which had begun early, manifested every symptom of ending late, and in the meantime walked down the years holding hands fast, and by no means forgetting to touch lips.

Hanging up the gray top hat, he went in search of her. He found her in his dressing-room, surrounded by a number of little bottles, which she was examining vaguely, and putting one by one into an 'inherited' waste-paper basket. Having watched her for a little while with a certain pleasure, he said:

“Yes, my dear?”

Noticing his presence, and continuing to put bottles into the basket, she answered:

“I thought I must—they're what dear Mother's given us.”

There they lay—little bottles filled with white and brown fluids, white and blue and brown powders; green and brown and yellow ointments; black lozenges; buff plasters; blue and pink and purple pills. All beautifully labelled and corked.

And he said in a rather faltering voice:

“Bless her! How she does give her things away! Haven't we used ANY?”

“Not one. And they have to be cleared away before they're stale, for fear we might take one by mistake.”

“Poor Mother!”

“My dear, she's found something newer than them all by now.”

Felix sighed.

“The nomadic spirit. I have it, too!”

And a sudden vision came to him of his mother's carved ivory face, kept free of wrinkles by sheer will-power, its firm chin, slightly aquiline nose, and measured brows; its eyes that saw everything so quickly, so fastidiously, its compressed mouth that smiled sweetly, with a resolute but pathetic acceptation. Of the piece of fine lace, sometimes black, sometimes white, over her gray hair. Of her hands, so thin now, always moving a little, as if all the composure and care not to offend any eye by allowing Time to ravage her face, were avenging themselves in that constant movement. Of her figure, that was short but did not seem so, still quick-moving, still alert, and always dressed in black or gray. A vision of that exact, fastidious, wandering spirit called Frances Fleeming Freeland—that spirit strangely compounded of domination and humility, of acceptation and cynicism; precise and actual to the point of desert dryness; generous to a point that caused her family to despair; and always, beyond all things, brave.

Flora dropped the last little bottle, and sitting on the edge of the bath let her eyebrows rise. How pleasant was

that impersonal humor which made her superior to other wives!

“You—nomadic? How?”

“Mother travels unceasingly from place to place, person to person, thing to thing. I travel unceasingly from motive to motive, mind to mind; my native air is also desert air—hence the sterility of my work.”

Flora rose, but her eyebrows descended.

“Your work,” she said, “is not sterile.”

“That, my dear,” said Felix, “is prejudice.” And perceiving that she was going to kiss him, he waited without annoyance. For a woman of forty-two, with two children and three books of poems—and not knowing which had taken least out of her—with hazel-gray eyes, wavy eyebrows darker than they should have been, a glint of red in her hair; wavy figure and lips; quaint, half-humorous indolence, quaint, half-humorous warmth—was she not as satisfactory a woman as a man could possibly have married!

“I have got to go down and see Tod,” he said. “I like that wife of his; but she has no sense of humor. How much better principles are in theory than in practice!”

Flora repeated softly, as if to herself:

“I'm glad I have none.” She was at the window leaning out, and Felix took his place beside her. The air was full of scent from wet leaves, alive with the song of birds thanking the sky. Suddenly he felt her arm round his ribs; either it or they—which, he could not at the moment tell—seemed extraordinarily soft....

Between Felix and his young daughter, Nedda, there existed the only kind of love, except a mother's, which has

much permanence—love based on mutual admiration. Though why Nedda, with her starry innocence, should admire him, Felix could never understand, not realizing that she read his books, and even analyzed them for herself in the diary which she kept religiously, writing it when she ought to have been asleep. He had therefore no knowledge of the way his written thoughts stimulated the ceaseless questioning that was always going on within her; the thirst to know why this was and that was not. Why, for instance, her heart ached so some days and felt light and eager other days? Why, when people wrote and talked of God, they seemed to know what He was, and she never did? Why people had to suffer; and the world be black to so many millions? Why one could not love more than one man at a time? Why—a thousand things? Felix's books supplied no answers to these questions, but they were comforting; for her real need as yet was not for answers, but ever for more questions, as a young bird's need is for opening its beak without quite knowing what is coming out or going in. When she and her father walked, or sat, or went to concerts together, their talk was neither particularly intimate nor particularly voluble; they made to each other no great confidences. Yet each was certain that the other was not bored—a great thing; and they squeezed each other's little fingers a good deal—very warming. Now with his son Alan, Felix had a continual sensation of having to keep up to a mark and never succeeding—a feeling, as in his favorite nightmare, of trying to pass an examination for which he had neglected to prepare; of having to preserve, in fact, form proper to the father of Alan Freeland. With Nedda he

had a sense of refreshment; the delight one has on a spring day, watching a clear stream, a bank of flowers, birds flying. And Nedda with her father—what feeling had she? To be with him was like a long stroking with a touch of tickle in it; to read his books, a long tickle with a nice touch of stroking now and then when one was not expecting it.

That night after dinner, when Alan had gone out and Flora into a dream, she snuggled up alongside her father, got hold of his little finger, and whispered:

“Come into the garden, Dad; I'll put on goloshes. It's an awfully nice moon.”

The moon indeed was palest gold behind the pines, so that its radiance was a mere shower of pollen, just a brushing of white moth-down over the reeds of their little dark pond, and the black blur of the flowering currant bushes. And the young lime-trees, not yet in full leaf, quivered ecstatically in that moon-witchery, still letting fall raindrops of the past spring torrent, with soft hissing sounds. A real sense in the garden, of God holding his breath in the presence of his own youth swelling, growing, trembling toward perfection! Somewhere a bird—a thrush, they thought—mixed in its little mind as to night and day, was queerly chirruping. And Felix and his daughter went along the dark wet paths, holding each other's arms, not talking much. For, in him, very responsive to the moods of Nature, there was a flattered feeling, with that young arm in his, of Spring having chosen to confide in him this whispering, rustling hour. And in Nedda was so much of that night's unutterable youth—no wonder she was silent! Then, somehow—neither responsible—they stood motionless. How

quiet it was, but for a distant dog or two, and the stilly shivering-down of the water drops, and the far vibration of the million-voiced city! How quiet and soft and fresh! Then Nedda spoke:

“Dad, I do so want to know everything.”

Not rousing even a smile, with its sublime immodesty, that aspiration seemed to Felix infinitely touching. What less could youth want in the very heart of Spring? And, watching her face put up to the night, her parted lips, and the moon-gleam fingering her white throat, he answered:

“It'll all come soon enough, my pretty!”

To think that she must come to an end like the rest, having found out almost nothing, having discovered just herself, and the particle of God that was within her! But he could not, of course, say this.

“I want to FEEL. Can't I begin?”

How many millions of young creatures all the world over were sending up that white prayer to climb and twine toward the stars, and—fall to earth again! And nothing to be answered, but:

“Time enough, Nedda!”

“But, Dad, there are such heaps of things, such heaps of people, and reasons, and—and life; and I know nothing. Dreams are the only times, it seems to me, that one finds out anything.”

“As for that, my child, I am exactly in your case. What's to be done for us?”

She slid her hand through his arm again.

“Don't laugh at me!”

“Heaven forbid! I meant it. You're finding out much quicker than I. It's all folk-music to you still; to me Strauss and the rest of the tired stuff. The variations my mind spins—wouldn't I just swap them for the tunes your mind is making?”

“I don't seem making tunes at all. I don't seem to have anything to make them of. Take me down to see 'the Tods,' Dad!”

Why not? And yet—! Just as in this spring night Felix felt so much, so very much, lying out there behind the still and moony dark, such marvellous holding of breath and waiting sentiency, so behind this innocent petition, he could not help the feeling of a lurking fatefulness. That was absurd. And he said: “If you wish it, by all means. You'll like your Uncle Tod; as to the others, I can't say, but your aunt is an experience, and experiences are what you want, it seems.”

Fervently, without speech, Nedda squeezed his arm.

CHAPTER IV

Table of Contents

Stanley Freeland's country house, Becket, was almost a show place. It stood in its park and pastures two miles from the little town of Transham and the Morton Plough Works; close to the ancestral home of the Moretons, his mother's family—that home burned down by Roundheads in the Civil War. The site—certain vagaries in the ground—Mrs. Stanley had caused to be walled round, and consecrated so to speak with a stone medallion on which were engraved the aged Moreton arms—arrows and crescent moons in proper juxtaposition. Peacocks, too—that bird 'parlant,' from the old Moreton crest—were encouraged to dwell there and utter their cries, as of passionate souls lost in too comfortable surroundings.

By one of those freaks of which Nature is so prodigal, Stanley—owner of this native Moreton soil—least of all four Freeland brothers, had the Moreton cast of mind and body. That was why he made so much more money than the other three put together, and had been able, with the aid of Clara's undoubted genius for rank and station, to restore a strain of Moreton blood to its rightful position among the county families of Worcestershire. Bluff and without sentiment, he himself set little store by that, smiling up his sleeve—for he was both kindly and prudent—at his wife who had been a Tomson. It was not in Stanley to appreciate the peculiar flavor of the Moretons, that something which in spite of their naivete and narrowness, had really been rather fine. To him, such Moretons as were left were 'dry enough

sticks, clean out of it.' They were of a breed that was already gone, the simplest of all country gentlemen, dating back to the Conquest, without one solitary conspicuous ancestor, save the one who had been physician to a king and perished without issue—marrying from generation to generation exactly their own equals; living simple, pious, parochial lives; never in trade, never making money, having a tradition and a practice of gentility more punctilious than the so-called aristocracy; constitutionally paternal and maternal to their dependents, constitutionally so convinced that those dependents and all indeed who were not 'gentry,' were of different clay, that they were entirely simple and entirely without arrogance, carrying with them even now a sort of Early atmosphere of archery and home-made cordials, lavender and love of clergy, together with frequent use of the word 'nice,' a peculiar regularity of feature, and a complexion that was rather parchmenty. High Church people and Tories, naturally, to a man and woman, by sheer inbred absence of ideas, and sheer inbred conviction that nothing else was nice; but withal very considerate of others, really plucky in bearing their own ills; not greedy, and not wasteful.

Of Becket, as it now was, they would not have approved at all. By what chance Edmund Moreton (Stanley's mother's grandfather), in the middle of the eighteenth century, had suddenly diverged from family feeling and ideals, and taken that 'not quite nice' resolution to make ploughs and money, would never now be known. The fact remained, together with the plough works. A man apparently of curious energy and character, considering his origin, he had dropped the E

from his name, and—though he continued the family tradition so far as to marry a Fleeming of Worcestershire, to be paternal to his workmen, to be known as Squire, and to bring his children up in the older Moreton 'niceness'—he had yet managed to make his ploughs quite celebrated, to found a little town, and die still handsome and clean-shaved at the age of sixty-six. Of his four sons, only two could be found sufficiently without the E to go on making ploughs. Stanley's grandfather, Stuart Morton, indeed, had tried hard, but in the end had reverted to the congenital instinct for being just a Moreton. An extremely amiable man, he took to wandering with his family, and died in France, leaving one daughter—Frances, Stanley's mother—and three sons, one of whom, absorbed in horses, wandered to Australia and was killed by falling from them; one of whom, a soldier, wandered to India, and the embraces of a snake; and one of whom wandered into the embraces of the Holy Roman Church.

The Morton Plough Works were dry and dwindling when Stanley's father, seeking an opening for his son, put him and money into them. From that moment they had never looked back, and now brought Stanley, the sole proprietor, an income of full fifteen thousand pounds a year. He wanted it. For Clara, his wife, had that energy of aspiration which before now has raised women to positions of importance in the counties which are not their own, and caused, incidentally, many acres to go out of cultivation. Not one plough was used on the whole of Becket, not even a Morton plough—these indeed were unsuitable to English soil and were all sent abroad. It was the corner-stone of his success that Stanley had completely seen through the talked-of

revival of English agriculture, and sedulously cultivated the foreign market. This was why the Becket dining-room could contain without straining itself large quantities of local magnates and celebrities from London, all deploring the condition of 'the Land,' and discussing without end the regrettable position of the agricultural laborer. Except for literary men and painters, present in small quantities to leaven the lump, Becket was, in fact, a rallying point for the advanced spirits of Land Reform—one of those places where they were sure of being well done at week-ends, and of congenial and even stimulating talk about the undoubted need for doing something, and the designs which were being entertained upon 'the Land' by either party. This very heart of English country that the old Moretons in their paternal way had so religiously farmed, making out of its lush grass and waving corn a simple and by no means selfish or ungenerous subsistence, was now entirely lawns, park, coverts, and private golf course, together with enough grass to support the kine which yielded that continual stream of milk necessary to Clara's entertainments and children, all female, save little Francis, and still of tender years. Of gardeners, keepers, cow-men, chauffeurs, footmen, stablemen—full twenty were supported on those fifteen hundred acres that formed the little Becket demesne. Of agricultural laborers proper—that vexed individual so much in the air, so reluctant to stay on 'the Land,' and so difficult to house when he was there, there were fortunately none, so that it was possible for Stanley, whose wife meant him to 'put up' for the Division, and his guests, who were frequently in Parliament, to hold entirely unbiassed and

impersonal views upon the whole question so long as they were at Becket.

It was beautiful there, too, with the bright open fields hedged with great elms, and that ever-rich serenity of its grass and trees. The white house, timbered with dark beams in true Worcestershire fashion, and added-to from time to time, had preserved, thanks to a fine architect, an old-fashioned air of spacious presidency above its gardens and lawns. On the long artificial lake, with innumerable rushy nooks and water-lilies and coverture of leaves floating flat and bright in the sun, the half-tame wild duck and shy water-hens had remote little worlds, and flew and splashed when all Becket was abed, quite as if the human spirit, with its monkey-tricks and its little divine flame, had not yet been born.

Under the shade of a copper-beech, just where the drive cut through into its circle before the house, an old lady was sitting that afternoon on a campstool. She was dressed in gray alpaca, light and cool, and had on her iron-gray hair a piece of black lace. A number of Hearth and Home and a little pair of scissors, suspended by an inexpensive chain from her waist, rested on her knee, for she had been meaning to cut out for dear Felix a certain recipe for keeping the head cool; but, as a fact, she sat without doing so, very still, save that, now and then, she compressed her pale fine lips, and continually moved her pale fine hands. She was evidently waiting for something that promised excitement, even pleasure, for a little rose-leaf flush had quavered up into a face that was colored like parchment; and her gray eyes under regular and still-dark brows, very

far apart, between which there was no semblance of a wrinkle, seemed noting little definite things about her, almost unwillingly, as an Arab's or a Red Indian's eyes will continue to note things in the present, however their minds may be set on the future. So sat Frances Fleeming Freeland (nee Morton) waiting for the arrival of her son Felix and her grandchildren Alan and Nedda.

She marked presently an old man limping slowly on a stick toward where the drive debouched, and thought at once: “He oughtn't to be coming this way. I expect he doesn't know the way round to the back. Poor man, he's very lame. He looks respectable, too.” She got up and went toward him, remarking that his face with nice gray moustaches was wonderfully regular, almost like a gentleman's, and that he touched his dusty hat with quite old-fashioned courtesy. And smiling—her smile was sweet but critical—she said: “You'll find the best way is to go back to that little path, and past the greenhouses. Have you hurt your leg?”

“My leg's been like that, m'm, fifteen year come Michaelmas.”

“How did it happen?”

“Ploughin'. The bone was injured; an' now they say the muscle's dried up in a manner of speakin'.”

“What do you do for it? The very best thing is this.”

From the recesses of a deep pocket, placed where no one else wore such a thing, she brought out a little pot.

“You must let me give it you. Put it on when you go to bed, and rub it well in; you'll find it act splendidly.”

The old man took the little pot with dubious reverence.