

**GEORGE
MEREDITH**

SANDRA
BELLONI,
VOLUME 6

George Meredith
Sandra Belloni. Volume 6

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Sandra Belloni – Volume 6:

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CHAPTER XL

Emilia stretched out her hand and said, "Good-bye." Seeing that the hardened girl, with her dead eyelids, did not appear to feel herself at his mercy, and also that Sir Purcell's forehead looked threatening, Mr. Pericles stopped his sardonic noise. He went straight to the door, which he opened with alacrity, and mimicking very wretchedly her words of adieu, stood prepared to bow her out. She astonished him by passing without another word. Before he could point a phrase bitter enough for expression, Sir Purcell had likewise passed, and in going had given him a quietly admonishing look.

"Zose Poles are beggars!" Mr. Pericles roared after them over the stairs, and slammed his door for emphasis. Almost immediately there was a knock at it. Mr. Pericles stood bent and cat-like as Sir Purcell reappeared. The latter, avoiding all preliminaries, demanded of the Greek that he should promise not to use the names of his friends publicly in such a manner again.

"I require a promise for the future. An apology will be needless from you."

"I shall not give it," said Mr. Pericles, with a sharp lift of his

upper lip.

"But you will give me the promise I have returned for."

In answer Mr. Pericles announced that he had spoken what was simply true: that the prosperity of the Poles was fictitious: that he, or any unfavourable chance, could ruin them: and that their friends might do better to protect their interests than by menacing one who had them in his power.

Sir Purcell merely reiterated his demand for the promise, which was ultimately snarled to him; whereupon he retired, joy on his features. For, Cornelia poor, she might be claimed by him fearlessly: that is to say, without the fear of people whispering that the penniless baronet had sued for gold, and without the fear of her father rejecting his suit. At least he might, with this knowledge that he had gained, appoint to meet her now! All the morning Sir Purcell had been combative, owing to that subordinate or secondary post he occupied in a situation of some excitement;—which combativeness is one method whereby men thus placed, imagining that they are acting devotedly for their friends, contrive still to assert themselves. He descended to the foot of the stairs, where he had told Emilia to wait for him, full of kind feelings and ready cheerful counsels; as thus: "Nothing that we possess belongs to us;—All will come round rightly in the end; Be patient, look about for amusement, and improve your mind." And more of this copper coinage of wisdom in the way of proverbs. But Emilia was nowhere visible to receive the administration of comfort. Outside the house the

fog appeared to have swallowed her. With some chagrin on her behalf (partly a sense of duty unfulfilled) Sir Purcell made his way to the residence of the Marinis, to report of her there, if she should not have arrived. The punishment he inflicted on himself in keeping his hand an hour from that letter to be written to Cornelia, was almost pleasing; and he was rewarded by it, for the projected sentences grew mellow and rich, condensed and throbbed eloquently. What wonder, that with such a mental occupation, he should pass Emilia and not notice her? She let him go.

But when he was out of sight, all seemed gone. The dimly-lighted city wore a look of Judgement terrible to see. Her brain was slave to her senses: she fancied she had dropped into an underground kingdom, among a mysterious people. The anguish through which action had just hurried her, now fell with a conscious weight upon her heart. She stood a moment, seeing her desolation stretch outwardly into endless labyrinths; and then it narrowed and took hold of her as a force within: changing thus, almost with each breathing of her body.

The fog had thickened. Up and down the groping city went muffled men, few women. Emilia looked for one of her sex who might have a tender face. Desire to be kissed and loved by a creature strange to her, and to lay her head upon a woman's bosom, moved her to gaze around with a longing once or twice; but no eyes met hers, and the fancy recurred vividly that she was not in the world she had known. Otherwise, what had robbed her

of her voice? She played with her fancy for comfort, long after any real vitality in it had oozed out. Her having strength to play at fancies showed that a spark of hope was alive. In truth, firm of flesh as she was, to believe that all worth had departed from her was impossible, and when she reposed simply on her sensations, very little trouble beset her: only when she looked abroad did the aspect of numerous indifferent faces, and the harsh flowing of the world its own way, tell her she had lost her power. Could it be lost? The prospect of her desolation grew so wide to her that she shut her eyes, abandoning herself to feeling; and this by degrees moved her to turn back and throw herself at the feet of Mr. Pericles. For, if he said, "Wait, my child, and all will come round well," she was prepared blindly to think so. The projection of the words in her mind made her ready to weep: but as she neared the house of his office the wish to hear him speak that, became passionate; she counted all that depended on it, and discovered the size of the fabric she had built on so thin a plank. After a while, her steps were mechanically swift. Before she reached the chambers of Mr. Pericles she had walked, she knew not why, once round the little quiet enclosed city-garden, and a cold memory of those men who had looked at her face gave her some wonder, to be quickly kindled into fuller comprehension.

Beholding Emilia once more, Mr. Pericles enjoyed a revival of his taste for vengeance; but, unhappily for her, he found it languid, and when he had rubbed his hands, stared, and by sundry sharp utterances brought her to his feet, his satisfaction was less

poignant than he had expected. As a consequence, instead of speaking outrageously, according to his habit, in wrath, he was now frigidly considerate, informing Emilia that it would be good for her if she were dead, seeing that she was of no use whatever; but, as she was alive, she had better go to her father and mother, and learn knitting, or some such industrial employment. "Unless zat man for whom you play fool!—" Mr. Pericles shrugged the rest of his meaning.

"But my voice may not be gone," urged Emilia. "I may sing to you to-morrow—this evening. It must be the fog. Why do you think it lost? It can't be—"

"Cracked!" cried Mr. Pericles.

"It is not! No; do not think it. I may stay here. Don't tell me to go yet. The streets make me wish to die. And I feel I may, perhaps, sing presently. Wait. Will you wait?"

A hideous imitation of her lamentable tones burst from Mr. Pericles.

"Cracked!" he cried again.

Emilia lifted her eyes, and looked at him steadily. She saw the idea grow in the eyes fronting her that she had a pleasant face, and she at once staked this little bit of newly-conceived worth on an immediate chance. Remember; that she was as near despair as a creature constituted so healthily could go. Speaking no longer in a girlish style, but with the grave pleading manner of a woman, she begged Mr. Pericles to take her to Italy, and have faith in the recovery of her voice. He, however, far from being softened,

as he grew aware of her sweetness of feature, waxed violent and insulting.

"Take me," she said. "My voice will reward you. I feel that you can cure it."

"For zat man! to go to him again!" Mr. Pericles sneered.

"I never shall do that." There sprang a glitter as of steel in Emilia's eyes. "I will make myself yours for life, if you like. Take my hand, and let me swear. I do not break my word. I will swear, that if I recover my voice to become what you expected,—I will marry you whenever you ask me, and then—"

More she was saying, but Mr. Pericles, sputtering a laugh of "Sanks!" presented a postured supplication for silence.

"I am not a man who marries."

He plainly stated the relations that the woman whom he had distinguished by the honours of selection must hold toward him.

Emilia's cheeks did not redden; but, without any notion of shame at the words she listened to, she felt herself falling lower and lower the more her spirit clung to Mr. Pericles: yet he alone was her visible personification of hope, and she could not turn from him. If he cast her off, it seemed to her that her voice was condemned. She stood there still, and the cold-eyed Greek formed his opinion.

He was evidently undecided as regards his own course of proceeding, for his chin was pressed by thumb and forefinger hard into his throat, while his eyebrows were wrinkled up to their highest elevation. From this attitude, expressive of the accurate

balancing of the claims of an internal debate, he emerged into the posture of a cock crowing, and Emilia heard again his bitter mimicry of her miserable broken tones, followed by Ha! dam! Basta! basta!"

"Sit here," cried Mr. Pericles. He had thrown himself into a chair, and pointed to his knee.

Emilia remained where she was standing.

He caught at her hand, but she plucked that from him. Mr. Pericles rose, sounding a cynical "Hein!"

"Don't touch me," said Emilia.

Nothing exasperates certain natures so much as the effort of the visibly weak to intimidate them.

"I shall not touch you?" Mr. Pericles sneered. "Zen, why are you here?"

"I came to my friend," was Emilia's reply.

"Your friend! He is not ze friend of a couac-couac. Once, if you please: but now" (Mr. Pericles shrugged), "now you are like ze rest of women. You are game. Come to me."

He caught once more at her hand, which she lifted; then at her elbow.

"Will you touch me when I tell you not to?"

There was the soft line of an involuntary frown over her white face, and as he held her arm from the doubled elbow, with her clenched hand aloft, she appeared ready to strike a tragic blow.

Anger and every other sentiment vanished from Mr. Pericles in the rapturous contemplation of her admirable artistic pose.

"Mon Dieu! and wiz a voice!" he exclaimed, dashing his fist in a delirium of forgetfulness against the one plastered lock of hair on his shining head. "Little fool! little dam fool!—zat might have been"—(Mr. Pericles figured in air with his fingers to signify the exaltation she was to have attained)—"Mon Dieu! and look at you! Did I not warn you? non a vero? Did I not say 'Ruin, ruin, if you go so? For a man!—a voice! You will not come to me? Zen, hear! you shall go to old Belloni. I do not want you, my pretty dear. Woman is a trouble, a drug. You shall go to old Belloni; and, crack! if ze voice will come back to a whip,—bravo, old Belloni!"

Mr. Pericles turned to reach down his hat from a peg. At the same instant Emilia quitted the room.

Dusk was deepening the yellow atmosphere, and the crowd was now steadily flowing in one direction. The bereaved creature went with the stream, glad to be surrounded and unseen, till it struck her, at last, that she was moving homeward. She stopped with a pang of grief, turned, and met all those people to whom the fireside was a beacon. For some time she bore against the pressure, but her loneliness overwhelmed her. None seemed to go her way. For a refuge, she turned into one of the city side streets, where she was quite alone. Unhappily, the street was of no length, and she soon came to the end of it. There was the choice of retracing her steps, or entering a strange street; and while she hesitated a troop of sheep went by, that made a piteous noise. She followed them, thinking curiously of the something broken that

appeared to be in their throats. By-and-by, the thought flashed in her that they were going to be slaughtered. She held her step, looking at them, but without any tender movement of the heart. They came to a butcher's yard, and went in.

When she had passed along a certain distance, a shiver seized her, and her instinct pushed her toward the lighted shops, where there were pictures. In one she saw the portrait of that Queen of Song whom she had heard at Besworth. Two young men, glancing as they walked by arm in arm, pronounced the name of the great enchantress, and hummed one of her triumphant airs. The features expressed health, humour, power, every fine animal faculty. Genius was on the forehead and the plastic mouth; the forehead being well projected, fair, and very shapely, showing clear balance, as well as capacity to grasp flame, and fling it. The line reaching to a dimple from the upper lip was saved from scornfulness by the lovely gleam, half-challenging, half-consoling, regal, roguish—what you would—that sat between her dark eyelashes, like white sunlight on the fringed smooth roll of water by a weir. Such a dimple, and such a gleam of eyes, would have been keys to the face of a weakling, and it was the more fascinating from the disregard of any minor charm notable upon this grand visage, which could not suffer a betrayal. You saw, and there was no effort to conceal, that the spirit animating it was intensely human; but it was human of the highest chords of humanity, indifferent to finesse and despising subtleties; gifted to speak, to inspire, and to command all great

emotions. In fact, it was the masque of a dramatic artist in repose. Tempered by beauty, the robust frame showed that she possessed a royal nature, and could, as a foremost qualification for Art, feel harmoniously. She might have many of the littlenesses of which women are accused; for Art she promised unspotted excellence, and, adorable as she was by attraction of her sex, she was artist over all.

Emilia found herself on one of the bridges, thinking of this aspect. Beneath her was the stealing river, with its red intervals, and the fog had got a wider circle. She could not disengage that face from her mind. It seemed to say to her, boldly, "I live because success is mine;" and to hint, as with a paler voice, "Death the fruit of failure." Could she, Emilia, ever be looked on again by her friends? The dread of it gave her shudders. Then, death was certainly easy! But death took no form in her imagination, as it does to one seeking it. She desired to forget and to hide her intolerable losses; to have the impostor she felt herself to be buried. As she walked along she held out her hands, murmuring, "Helpless! useless!" It came upon her as a surprise that one like herself should be allowed to live. "I don't want to," she said; and the next moment, "I wonder what a drowned woman is like?" She hurried back to the streets and the shops. The shops failed now to give her distraction, for a stiff and dripping image floated across all the windows, and she was glad to see the shutters being closed; though, when the streets were dark, some friendliness seemed to have gone. When the streets were

quits dark, save for the row of lamps, she walked fast, fearing she knew not what.

A little Italian boy sat doubled over his organ on a doorstep, while a yet smaller girl at his elbow plied him with questions in English. Emilia stopped before them, and the girl complained to her that the perverse little foreigner would not answer. Two or three words in his native tongue soon brought his face to view. Emilia sat down between them, and listened to the prattle of two languages. The girl said that she never had supper, which was also the case with the boy; so Emilia felt for her purse, and sent the girl with sixpence in search of a shop that sold cafes. The girl came back with her apron full. As they were all about to eat, a policeman commanded them to quit the spot, informing them that he knew both them and their dodges. Emilia stood up, and was taking her little people away, when the policeman, having suddenly changed his accurate opinion of her, said, "You're giving 'em some supper, miss? Oh, they must sit down to their suppers, you know!" and walked away, not to be a witness of this infraction of the law. So, they sat down and ate, and the boy and girl tried to say intelligible things to one another, and laughed. Emilia could not help joining in their laughter. The girl was very anxious to know whether the boy was ever beaten, and hearing that he was, she appeared better satisfied, remarking that she was also, but curious still as to the different forms of chastisement they received. This being partially explained, she wished to know whether he would be beaten that night, Emilia interpreting. A

grin, and a rapid whistle and 'cluck,' significant of the application of whips, told the state of his expectations; at which the girl clapped her hands, adding, lamentably, "So shall I, 'cause I am always." Emilia gathered them under each shoulder, when, to her delight and half perplexity, they closed their eyes, leaning against her.

The policeman passed, and for an hour endured this spectacle. At last he felt compelled to explain to Emilia what were the sentiments of gentlefolks with regard to their doorsteps, apart from the law of the matter. He put it to her human nature whether she would like her doorsteps to be blocked, so that no one could enter, and anyone emerging stood a chance of being precipitated, nose foremost, upon the pavement. Then, again, as gentle-folks had good experience of, the young ones in London were twice as cunning as the old. Emilia pleaded for her sleeping pair, that they might not be disturbed. Her voice gave the keeper of the peace notions of her being one of the eccentric young ladies who are occasionally 'missing,' and have advertizing friends. He uttered a stern *ahem!* preliminary to assent; but the noise wakened the children, who stared, and readily obeyed his gesture, which said, "Be off!" while his words were those of remonstrance. Emilia accompanied them a little way. Both promised eagerly that they would be at the same place the night following and departed—the boy with laughing nods and waving of hands, which the girl imitated. Emilia's feeling of security went with them. She at once feigned a destination in the distance, and set forward to reach it,

but the continued exposure of this delusion made it difficult to renew. She fell to counting the hours that were to elapse before she would meet those children, saying to herself, that whatever she did she must keep her engagement to be at the appointed steps. This restriction set her darkly fancying that she wished for her end.

Remembering those men who had looked at her admiringly, "Am I worth looking at?" she said; and it gave her some pleasure to think that she had it still in her power to destroy a thing of value. She was savagely ashamed of going to death empty-handed. By-and-by, great fatigue stiffened her limbs, and she sat down from pure want of rest. The luxury of rest and soothing languor kept hard thoughts away. She felt as if floating, for a space. The fear of the streets left her. But when necessity for rest had gone, she clung to the luxury still, and sitting bent forward, with her hands about her knees, she began to brood over tumbled images of a wrong done to her. She had two distinct visions of herself, constantly alternating and acting like the temptation of two devils. One represented her despicable in feature, and bade her die; the other showed a fair face, feeling which to be her own, Emilia had fits of intolerable rage. This vision prevailed; and this wicked side of her humanity saved her. Active despair is a passion that must be superseded by a passion. Passive despair comes later; it has nothing to do with mental action, and is mainly a corruption or degradation of our blood. The rage in Emilia was blind at first, but it rose like a hawk, and singled

its enemy. She fixed her mind to conceive the foolishness of putting out a face that her rival might envy, and of destroying anything that had value. The flattery of beauty came on her like a warm garment. When she opened her eyes, seeing what she was and where, she almost smiled at the silly picture that had given her comfort. Those men had looked on her admiringly, it was true, but would Wilfrid have ceased to love her if she had been beautiful? An extraordinary intuition of Wilfrid's sentiment tormented her now. She saw herself in the light that he would have seen her by, till she stood with the sensations of an exposed criminal in the dark length of the street, and hurried down it, back, as well as she could find her way, to the friendly policeman.

Her question on reaching him, "Are you married?" was prodigiously astonishing, and he administered the rebuff of an affirmative with severity. "Then," said Emilia, "when you go home, let me go with you to your wife. Perhaps she will consent to take care of me for this night." The policeman coughed mildly and replied, "It's plain you know nothing of women—begging your pardon, miss,—for I can see you're a lady." Emilia repeated her petition, and the policeman explained the nature of women. Not to be baffled, Emilia said, "I think your wife must be a good woman." Hereat the policeman laughed, arming "that the best of them knew what bad suspicions was." Ultimately, he consented to take her to his wife, when he was relieved, after the term of so many minutes. Emilia stood at a distance, speculating on the possible choice he would make of a tune to accompany his

monotonous walk to and fro, and on the certainty of his wearing any tune to nothing.

She was in a bed, sleeping heavily, a little before dawn.

The day that followed was her day of misery. The blow that had stunned her had become as a loud intrusive pulse in her head. By this new daylight she fathomed the depth, and reckoned the value, of her loss. And her senses had no pleasure in the light, though there was sunshine. The woman who was her hostess was kind, but full of her first surprise at the strange visit, and too openly ready for any information the young lady might be willing to give with regard to her condition, prospects, and wishes. Emilia gave none. She took the woman's hand, asking permission to remain under her protection. The woman by-and-by named a sum of money as a sum for weekly payment, and Emilia transferred all to her that she had. The policeman and his wife thought her, though reasonable, a trifle insane. She sat at a window for hours watching a 'last man' of the fly species walking up and plunging down a pane of glass. On this transparent solitary field for the most objectless enterprise ever undertaken, he buzzed angrily at times, as if he had another meaning in him, which was being wilfully misinterpreted. Then he mounted again at his leisure, to pitch backward as before. Emilia found herself thinking with great seriousness that it was not wonderful for boys to be always teasing and killing flies, whose thin necks and bobbing heads themselves suggested the idea of decapitation. She said to her hostess: "I don't like flies. They seem never to sing

but when they are bothered." The woman replied: "Ah, indeed?" very smoothly, and thought: "If you was to bust out now, which of us two would be strongest?" Emilia grew distantly aware that the policeman and his wife talked of her and watched her with combined observation.

When it was night she went to keep her appointment. The girl was there, but the boy came late. He said he had earned only a few pence that day, and would be beaten. He spoke in a whimpering tone which caused the girl to desire a translation of his words. Emilia told her how things were with him, and the girl expressed a wish that she had an organ, as in that case she would be sure to earn more than sixpence a day; such being the amount that procured her nightly a comfortable reception in the arms of her parents. "Do you like music?" said Emilia. The girl replied that she liked organs; but, as if to avoid committing an injustice, cited parrots as foremost in her affections. Holding them both to her breast, Emilia thought that she would rescue them from this beating by giving them the money they had to offer for kindness: but the restlessness of the children suddenly made her a third party to the thought of cakes. She had no money. Her heart bled for the poor little hungry, apprehensive creatures. For a moment she half fancied she had her voice, and looked up at the windows of the pitiless houses with a bold look; but there was a speedy mockery of her thought "You shall listen: you shall open!" She coughed hoarsely, and then fell into fits of crying. Her friend the policeman came by and took her arm with a force that

he meant to be persuasive; so lifting her and handing her some steps beyond the limit of his beat, with stern directions for her to proceed home immediately. She obeyed. Next day she asked her hostess to lend her half-a-crown. The woman snapped shortly in answer: "No; the less you have the better." Emilia was obliged to abandon her little people.

She was to this extent the creature of mania: that she could not conceive of a way being open by which she might return to her father and mother, or any of her friends. It was to her not a matter for her will to decide upon, but simply a black door shut that nothing could displace. When the week, for which term of shelter she had paid, was ended, her hostess spoke upon this point, saying, more to convince Emilia of the necessity for seeking her friends than from any unkindness: "Me and my husband can't go on keepin' you, you know, my dear, however well's our meaning." Emilia drew the woman toward her with both her hands, softly shaking her head. She left the house about noon.

It was now her belief that she had probably no more than another day to live, for she was destitute of money. The thought relieved her from that dreadful fear of the street, and she walked at her own pace, even after dark. The rumble and the rattle of wheels; the cries and grinding noises; the hum of motion and talk; all under the lingering smoky red of a London Winter sunset, were not discord to her animated blood. Her un hunted spirit made a music of them. It was not like the music of other days, nor was the exultation it created at all like happiness: but she at least

forgot herself. Voices came in her ear, and hung unheard until long after the speaker had passed. Hunger did not assail her. She was not beset by an animal weakness; and having in her mind no image of death, and with her ties to life cut away;—thus devoid of apprehension or regret, she was what her quick blood made her, for the time. She recognized that, for one near extinction, it was useless to love or to hate: so Wilfrid and Lady Charlotte were spared. Emilia thought of them both with a sort of equanimity; not that any clear thought filled her brain through that delirious night. The intoxicating music raged there at one level depression, never rising any scale, never undulating ever so little, scarcely changing its barbarous monotony of notes. She had no power over it. Her critical judgement would at another moment have shrieked at it. She was moved by it as by a mechanical force.

The South-west wind blew, and the hours of the night were not evil to outcasts. Emilia saw many lying about, getting rest where they might. She hurried her eye pityingly over little children, but the devil that had seized her sprang contempt for the others—older beggars, who appeared to succumb to their fate when they should have lifted their heads up bravely. On she passed from square to market, market to park; and presently her mind shot an arrow of desire for morning, which was nothing less than hunger beginning to stir. "When will the shops open?" She tried to cheat herself by replying that she did not care when, but pangs of torment became too rapid for the counterfeit. Her imagination raised the roof from those great rich houses, and laid bare a

brilliancy of dish-covers; and if any sharp gust of air touched the nerve in her nostril, it seemed instantaneously charged with the smell of old dinners. "No," cried Emilia, "I dislike anything but plain food." She quickly gave way, and admitted a craving for dainty morsels. "One lump of sugar!" she subsequently sighed. But neither sugar nor meat approached her.

Her seat was under trees, between a man and a woman who slanted from her with hidden chins. The chilly dry leaves began to waken, and the sky showed its grey. Hunger had become as a leaden ball in Emilia's chest. She could have eaten eagerly still, but she had no ravenous images of food. Nevertheless, she determined to beg for bread at a baker's shop. Coming into the empty streets again, the dread of exposing her solitary wretchedness and the stains of night upon her, kept her back. When she did venture near the baker's shop, her sensation of weariness, want of washing, and general misery, made her feel a contrast to all other women she saw, that robbed her of the necessary effrontery. She preferred to hide her head.

The morning hours went in this conflict. She was between-whiles hungry and desperate, or stricken with shame. Fatigue, bringing the imperious necessity for rest, intervened as a relief. Emilia moaned at the weary length of the light, but when dusk fell and she beheld flame in the lamps, it seemed to be too sudden and she was alarmed. Passive despair had set in. She felt sick, though not weak, and the thought of asking help had gone.

A street urchin, of the true London species, in whom excess

of woollen comforter made up for any marked scantiness in the rest of his attire, came trotting the pavement, pouring one of the favourite tunes of his native metropolis through the tube of a penny-whistle, from which it did not issue so disguised but that attentive ears might pronounce it the royal march of the Cannibal Islands. A placarded post beside a lamp met this musician's eye; and, still piping, he bent his knees and read the notification. Emilia thought of the Hillford and Ipley clubmen, the big drum, the speeches, the cheers, and all the wild strength that lay in her that happy morning. She watched the boy piping as if he were reading from a score, and her sense of humour was touched. "You foolish boy!" she said to herself softly. But when, having evidently come to the last printed line, the boy rose and pocketed his penny-whistle, Emilia was nearly laughing. "That's because he cannot turn over the leaf," she said, and stood by the post till long after the boy had disappeared. The slight emotion of fun had restored to her some of her lost human sensations, and she looked about for a place where to indulge them undisturbed. One of the bridges was in sight She yearned for the solitude of the wharf beside it, and hurried to the steps. To descend she had to pass a street-organ and a small figure bent over it. "Sei buon' Italiano?" she said. The answer was a surly "Si." Emilia cried convulsively "Addio!" Her brain had become on a sudden vacant of a thought, and all she knew was that she descended.

CHAPTER XLI

"Sei buon' Italiana?"

Across what chasm did the words come to her?

It seemed but a minutes and again many hours back, that she had asked that question of a little fellow, who, if he had looked up and nodded would have given her great joy, but who kept his face dark from her and with a sullen "Si" extinguished her last feeling of a desire for companionship with life.

"Si," she replied, quite as sullenly, and without looking up.

But when her hand was taken and other words were uttered, she that had crouched there so long between death and life immovable, loving neither, rose possessed of a passion for the darkness and the void, and struggling bitterly with the detaining hand, crying for instant death. No strength was in her to support the fury.

"Merthyr Powys is with you," said her friend, "and will never leave you."

"Will never take me up there?" Emilia pointed to the noisy level above them.

"Listen, and I will tell you how I have found you," replied Merthyr.

"Don't force me to go up."

She spoke from the end of her breath. Merthyr feared that it was more than misery, even madness, afflicting her. He sat on the

wharf-bench silent till she was reassured. But at his first words, the eager question came: "You will not force me to go up there?"

"No; we can stay and talk here," said Merthyr. "And this is how I have found you. Do you suppose you have been hidden from us all this time? Perhaps you fancy you do not belong to your friends? Well, I spoke to all of your 'children,' as you used to call them. Do you remember? The day before yesterday two had seen you. You said to one, 'From Savoy or Piedmont?' He said, 'From Savoy;' and you shook your head: 'Not looking on Italy!' you said. This night I roused one of them, and he stretched his finger down the steps, saying that you had gone down there. 'Sei buon' Italiano?" you said. "And that is how I have found you. Sei buon' Italiana?"

Emilia let her hand rest in Merthyr's, wondering to think that there should be no absolute darkness for a creature to escape into while living. A trembling came on her. "Let me look over at the water," she said; and Merthyr, who trusted her even in that extremity, allowed her to lean forward, and felt her grasp grow moist in his, till she turned back with shudders, giving him both her hands. "A drowned woman looks so dreadful!" Her speech was faint as she begged to be taken away from that place. Merthyr put his hand to her arm-pit, sustaining her steps. As they neared the level where men were, she looked behind her and realized the black terrors she had just been blindly handling. Fright sped her limbs for a second or two, and then her whole weight hung upon Merthyr. He held her in both arms, thinking that she had

swooned, but she murmured: "Have you heard that my voice has gone?"

"If you have suffered, I do not wonder," he said.

"I am useless. My voice is dead."

"Useless to your friends? Tush, my little Emilia! Sandra mia! Don't you know that while you love your friends that's all they want of you?"

"Oh!" she moaned; "the gas-lamp hurts me. What a noise there is!"

"We shall soon get away from the noise."

"No; I like it; but not the light. Oh, my feet!—why are you walking still? What friends?"

"For instance, myself."

"You knew of my wandering about London! It makes me believe in heaven.

I can't bear to think of being unseen."

"This morning," said Merthyr, "I saw the policeman in whose house you have been staying."

Emilia bowed her head to the mystery by which this friend was endowed to be cognizant of her actions. "I feel that I have not seen the streets for years. If it were not for you I should fall down.—Oh! do you understand that my voice has quite gone?"

Merthyr perceived her anxiety to be that she might not betaken on doubtful terms. "Your hand hasn't," he said, pressing it, and so gratified her with a concrete image of something that she could still bestow upon a friend. To this she clung while

the noisy wheels bore her through London, till her weak body failed to keep courage in her breast, and she wept and came closer to Merthyr. He who supposed that her recent despair and present tears were for the loss of her lover, gave happily more comfort than he took. "When old gentlemen choose to interest themselves about very young ladies," he called upon his humorous philosophy to observe internally, as men do to forestall the possible cynic external;—and the rest of the sentence was acted under his eyes by the figures of three persons. But, there she was, lying within his arm, rescued, the creature whom he had found filling his heart, when lost, and whom he thought one of the most hopeful of the women of earth! He thanked God for bare facts. She lay against him with her eyelids softly joined, and as he felt the breathing of her body, he marvelled to think how matter-of-fact they had both been on the brink of a tragedy, and how naturally she had, as it were, argued herself up to the gates of death. For want of what? "My sister may supply it," thought Merthyr.

"Oh! that river is like a great black snake with a sick eye, and will come round me!" said Emilia, talking as from sleep; then started, with fright in her face: "Oh! my hunger again!"

"Hunger!" said he, horrified.

"It comes worse than ever," she moaned. "I was half dead just now, and didn't feel it. There's—there's no pain in death. But this—it's like fire and frost! I feel being eaten up. Give me something."

Merthyr set his teeth and enveloped her in a tight hug that relieved her from the sharper pangs; and so held her, the tears bursting through his shut eyelids, till at the first hotel they reached he managed to get food for her. She gave a little gasping cry when he put bread through the window of the cab. Bit by bit he handed her the morsels. It was impossible to procure broth. When they drove on, she did not complain of suffering, but her chest rose and fell many times heavily. She threw him out in the reading of her character, after a space, by excusing herself for having eaten with such eagerness; and it was long before he learnt what Wilfrid's tyrannous sentiment had done to this simple nature. He understood better the fear she expressed of meeting Georgiana. Nevertheless, she exhibited none on entering the house, and returned Georgiana's embrace with what strength was left to her.

CHAPTER XLII

Up the centre aisle of Hillford Church, the Tinleys (late as usual) were seen trooping for morning service in midwinter. There was a man in the rear known to be a man by the sound of his boots and measure of his stride, for the ladies of Brookfield, having rejected the absurd pretensions of Albert Tinley, could not permit curiosity to encounter the risk of meeting his gaze by turning their heads. So, with charitable condescension they returned the slight church nod of prim Miss Tinley passing, of the detestable Laura Tinley, of affected Rose Tinley (whose complexion was that of a dust-bin), and of Madeline Tinley (too young for a character beyond what the name bestowed), and then they arranged their prayer-books, and apparently speculated as to the possible text that morning to be given forth from the pulpit. But it seemed to them all that an exceedingly bulky object had passed as guardian of the light-footed damsels preceding him. Though none of the ladies had looked up as he passed, they were conscious of a stature and a circumference which they had deemed to be entirely beyond the reach of the Tinleys, and a scornful notion of the Tinleys having hired a guardsman, made Arabella smile at the stretch of her contempt, that could help her to conceive the ironic possibility. Relieved on the suspicion that Albert was in attendance of his sisters, they let their eyes fall calmly on the Tinley pew. Could two men upon this earthly

sphere possess such a bearskin? There towered the shoulders of Mr. Pericles; his head looking diminished by the huge collar. Arabella felt a seizure of her hand from Adela's side. She placed her book open before her, and stared at the pulpit. From neither of the three of Brookfield could Laura's observation extract a sign of the utter astonishment she knew they must be experiencing; and had it not been for the ingenuous broad whisper of Mrs. Chump, which sounded toward the verge even of her conception of possibilities, the Tinleys would not have been gratified by the first public display of the prize they had wrested from the Poles.

"Mr. Paricles—oh!" went Mrs. Chump, and a great many pews were set in commotion.

Forthwith she bent over Cornelia's lap, and Cornelia, surveying her placidly, had to murmur, "By-and-by; by-and-by."

"But, did ye see 'm, my dear? and a forr'ner in a Protestant Church! And such a forr'ner as he is, to be sure! And, ye know, ye said he'd naver come with you, and it's them creatures ye don't like. Cornelia!"

"The service commences," remarked that lady, standing up.

Many eyes were on Mr. Pericles, who occasionally inspected the cornices and corbels and stained glass to right and left, or detected a young lady staring at him, or anticipated her going to stare, and put her to confusion by a sharp turn of his head, and then a sniff and smoothing down of his moustache. But he did not once look at the Brookfield pew. By hazard his eye ranged over it,

and after the first performance of this trick he would have found the ladies a match for him, even if he had sought to challenge their eyes. They were constrained to admit that Laura Tinley managed him cleverly. She made him hold a book and appear respectably devout. She got him down in good time when seats were taken, and up again, without much transparent persuasion. The first notes of the organ were seen to agitate the bearskin. Laura had difficulty to induce the man to rise for the hymn, and when he had listened to the intoning of a verse, Mr. Pericles suddenly bent, as if he had snapped in two: nor could Laura persuade him to rejoin the present posture of the congregation. Then only did Laura, to cover her failure, turn the subdued light of a merry smile upon the Brookfield pew.

The smile was noticed by Apprehension sitting in the corner of one eye, and it was likewise known that Laura's chagrin at finding that she was not being watched affected her visibly. At the termination of the sermon, the ladies bowed their heads a short space, and placing Mrs. Chump in front drove her out, so that her exclamations of wonderment, and affectedly ostentatious gaspings of sympathy for Brookfield, were heard by few. On they hurried, straight and fast to Brookfield. Mr. Pole was talking to Tracy Runningbrook at the gate. The ladies cut short his needless apology to the young man for not being found in church that day, by asking questions of Tracy. The first related to their brother's whereabouts; the second to Emilia's condition. Tracy had no time to reply. Mrs. Chump had identified herself with Brookfield so

warmly that the defection of Mr. Pericles was a fine legitimate excitement to her. "I hate 'm!" she cried. "I pos'tively hate the man! And he to go to church! A pretty figure for an angel—he, now! But, my dears, we cann't let annybody else have 'm. Shorrt of his bein' drowned or killed, we must intrigue to keep the wretch to ourselves."

"Oh, dear!" said Adela impatiently.

"Well, and I didn't say to myself, ye little jealous thing!" retorted

Mrs. Chump.

"Indeed, ma'am, you are welcome to him."

"And indeed, miss, I don't want 'm. And, perhaps, ye were flirtin' all the fun out of him on board the yacht, and got tired of 'm; and that's why."

Adela said: "Thank you," with exasperating sedateness, which provoked an intemperate outburst from Mrs. Chump. "Sunday! Sunday!" cried Mr. Pole.

"Ain't I the first to remember ut, Pole? And didn't I get up airyly so as to go to church and have my conscience qui't, and 'stead of that I come out full of evil passions, all for the sake o' these ungrateful garls that's always where ye cann't find 'em. Why, if they was to be married at the altar, they'd stare and be 'ffendud if ye asked them if they was thinking of their husbands, they would! 'Oh, dear, no! and ye're mistaken, and we're thinkin' o' the coal-scuttle in the back parlour,'— or somethin' about souls, if not coals. There's their answer. What did ye do with Mr. Paricles

on board the yacht? Aha!"

"What's this about Pericles?" said Mr. Pole.

"Oh, nothing, Papa," returned Adela.

"Nothing, do ye call ut!" said Mrs. Chump. "And, mayhap, good cause too. Didn't ye tease 'm, now, on board the yacht? Now, did he go on board the yacht at all?"

"I should think you ought to know that as well as Adela," said Mr. Pole.

Adela interposed, hurriedly: "All this, my dear Papa, is because Mr. Pericles has thought proper to visit the Tinleys' pew. Who would complain how or where he does it, so long as the duty is fulfilled?"

Mr. Pole stared, muttering: "The Tinleys!"

"She's botherin' of ye, Pole, the puss!" said Mrs. Chump, certain that she had hit a weak point in that mention of the yacht. "Ask her what sorr't of behaviour—"

"And he didn't speak to any of you?" said Mr. Pole.

"No, Papa."

"He looked the other way?"

"He did us that honour."

"Ask her, Pole, how she behaved to 'm on board the yacht," cried Mrs. Chump. "Oh! there was flirtin', fiirtin'! And go and see what the noble poet says of tying up in sacks and plumpin' of poor bodies of women into forty fathoms by them Turks and Greeks, all because of jeal'sy. So, they make a woman in earnest there, the wretches, 'cause she can't have onny of her jokes.

Didn't ye tease Mr. Paricles on board the yacht, Ad'la? Now, was he there?"

"Martha! you're a fool!" said Mr. Pole, looking the victim of one of his fits of agitation. "Who knows whether he was there better than you? You'll be forgetting soon that we've ever dined together. I hate to see a woman so absurd! There—never mind! Go in: take off bonnet something —anything! only I can't bear folly! Eh, Mr. Runningbrook?"

"Deed, Pole, and ye're mad." Mrs. Chump crossed her hands to reply with full repose. "I'd like to know how I'm to know what I never said."

The scene was growing critical. Adela consulted the eyes of her sisters, which plainly said that this was her peculiar scrape. Adela ended it by going up to Mrs. Chump, taking her by the shoulders, and putting a kiss upon her forehead. "Now you will see better," she said. "Don't you know Mr. Pericles was not with us? As surely as he was with the Tinleys this morning!"

"And a nice morning it is!" ejaculated Mr. Pole, trotting off hurriedly.

"Does Pole think—" Mrs. Chump murmured, with reference to her voyaging on the yacht. The kiss had bewildered her sequent sensations.

"He does think, and will think, and must think," Adela prattled some persuasive infantine nonsense: her soul all the while in revolt against her sisters, who left her the work to do, and took the position of spectators and critics, condemning an effort they

had not courage to attempt.

"By the way, I have to congratulate a friend of mine," said Tracy, selecting Adela for an ironical bow.

"Then it is Captain Gambier," cried Mrs. Chump, as if a whole revelation had burst on her. Adela blushed. "Oh! and what was that I heard?" continued the aggravating woman.

Adela flashed her eyes round on her sisters. Even then they left her without aid, their feeling being that she had debased the house by her familiarity with this woman before Tracy.

"Stay! didn't ye both—" Mrs. Chump was saying.

"Yes?"—Adela passed by her—"only in your ears alone, you know!" At which hint Mrs. Chump gleefully turned and followed her. A rumour was prevalent of some misadventure to Adela and the captain on board the yacht. Arabella saw her depart, thinking, "How singular is her propensity to imitate me!" for the affirmative uttered in the tone of interrogation was quite Arabella's own; as also occasionally the negative,—the negative, however, suiting the musical indifference of the sound, and its implied calm breast.

"As for Pericles," said Tracy, "you need not wonder that the fellow prays in other pews than yours. By heaven! he may pray and pray: I'd send him to Hades with an epigram in his heart!"

From Tracy the ladies learnt that Wilfrid had inflicted public chastisement upon Mr. Pericles for saying a false thing of Emilia. He danced the prettiest pas seal that was ever footed by debutant on the hot iron plates of Purgatory. They dared not ask what it

was that Mr. Pericles had said, but Tracy was so vehement on the subject of his having met his deserts, that they partly guessed it to bear some relation to their sex's defencelessness, and they approved their brother's work.

Sir Twickenham and Captain Gambier dined at Brookfield that day. However astonishing it might be to one who knew his character and triumphs, the captain was a butterfly netted, and was on the highroad to an exhibition of himself pinned, with his wings outspread. During the service of the table Tracy relieved Adela from Mrs. Chump's inadvertencies and little bits of feminine malice, but he could not help the captain, who blundered like a schoolboy in her rough hands. It was noted that Sir Twickenham reserved the tolerating smile he once had for her. Mr. Pole's nervous fretfulness had increased. He complained in occasional underbreaths, correcting himself immediately with a "No, no!" and blinking briskly.

But after dinner came the time when the painfulest scene was daily enacted. Mrs. Chump drank Port freely. To drink it fondly, it was necessary that she should have another rosy wineglass to nod to, and Mr. Pole, whose taste for wine had been weakened, took this post as his duty. The watchful, pinched features of the poor pale little man bloomed unnaturally, and his unintelligible eyes sparkled as he emptied his glass. His daughters knew that he drank, not for his pleasure, but for their benefit; that he might sustain Martha Chump in the delusion that he was a fitting bridegroom, and with her money save them from ruin. Each

evening, with remorse that blotted all perception of the tragic comicality of the show, they saw him, in his false strength and his anxiety concerning his pulse's play, act this part. The recurring words, "Now, Martha, here's the Port," sent a cold wave through their blood. They knew what the doctor remarked on the effect of that Port. "Ill!" Mrs. Chump would cry, when she saw him wink after sipping; "you, Pole! what do they say of ye, ye deer!" and she returned the wink, the ladies looking on. Not to drink a proper quantum of Port, when Port was on the table, was, in Mrs. Chump's eyes, mean for a man. Even Chump, she would say, was master of his bottle, and thought nothing of it. "Who does?" cried her present suitor, and the Port ebbed, and his cheeks grew crimson.

This frightful rivalry with the ghost of Alderman Chump continued night after night. The rapturous Martha was incapable of observing that if she drank with a ghost in memory, in reality she drank with nothing better than an animated puppet. The nights ended with Mr. Pole either sleeping in his arm-chair (upon which occasions one daughter watched him and told dreadful tales of his waking), or staggering to bed, debating on the stairs between tea and brandy, complaining of a loss of sensation at his knee-cap, or elbow, or else rubbing his head and laughing hysterically. His bride was not at such moments observant. No wonder Wilfrid kept out of the way, if he had not better occupation elsewhere. The ladies, in their utter anguish, after inveighing against the baneful Port, had begged their father

to delay no more to marry the woman. "Why?" said Mr. Pole, sharply; "what do you want me to marry her for?" They were obliged to keep up the delusion, and said, "Because she seems suited to you as a companion." That satisfied him. "Oh! we won't be in a hurry," he said, and named a day within a month; and not liking their unready faces, laughed, and dismissed the idea aloud, as if he had not earnestly been entertaining it.

The ladies of Brookfield held no more their happy, energetic midnight consultations. They had begun to crave for sleep and a snatch of forgetfulness, the scourge being daily on their flesh: and they had now no plans to discuss; they had no distant horizon of low vague lights that used ever to be beyond their morrow. They kissed at the bedroom door of one, and separated. Silence was their only protection to the Nice Feelings, now that Fine Shades had become impossible. Adela had almost made herself distinct from her sisters since the yachting expedition. She had grown severely careful of the keys of her writing-desk, and would sometimes slip the bolt of her bedroom door, and answer "Eh?" dubiously in tone, when her sisters had knocked twice, and had said "Open" once. The house of Brookfield showed those divisional rents which an admonitory quaking of the earth will create. Neither sister was satisfied with the other. Cornelia's treatment of Sir Twickenham was almost openly condemned, but at the same time it seemed to Arabella that the baronet was receiving more than the necessary amount of consolation from the bride of Captain Gambier, and that yacht habits and

moralties had been recently imported to Brookfield. Adela, for her part, looked sadly on Arabella, and longed to tell her, as she told Cornelia, that if she continued to play Freshfield Sumner purposely against Edward Buxley, she might lose both. Cornelia quietly measured accusations and judged impartially; her mind being too full to bring any personal observations to bear. She said, perhaps, less than she would have said, had she not known that hourly her own Nice Feelings had to put up a petition for Fine Shades: had she not known, indeed, that her conduct would soon demand from her sisters an absolutely merciful interpretation. For she was now simply attracting Sir Twickenham to Brookfield as a necessary medicine to her Papa. Since Mrs. Chump's return, however, Mr. Pole had spoken cheerfully of himself, and, by innuendo emphasized, had imparted that his mercantile prospects were brighter. In fact, Cornelia half thought that he must have been pretending bankruptcy to gain his end in getting the consent of his daughters to receive the woman. She, and Adela likewise, began to suspect that the parental transparency was a little mysterious, and that there is, after all, more than we see in something that we see through. They were now in danger of supposing that because the old man had possibly deceived them to some extent, he had deceived them altogether. But was not the after-dinner scene too horribly true? Were not his hands moist and cold while the forehead was crimson? And could a human creature feel at his own pulse, and look into vacancy with that intense apprehensive look, and be but an actor? They could

not think so. But his conditions being dependent upon them, the ladies felt in their hearts a spring of absolute rebellion when the call for fresh sacrifices came. Though they did not grasp the image, they had a feeling that he was nourished bit by bit by everything they held dear; and though they loved him, and were generous, they had begun to ask, "What next?"

The ladies were at a dead-lock, and that the heart is the father of our histories, I am led to think when I look abroad on families stagnant because of so weak a motion of the heart. There are those who have none at all; the mass of us are moved from the propulsion of the toes of the Fates. But the ladies of Brookfield had hearts lively enough to get them into scrapes. The getting out of them, or getting on at all, was left to Providence. They were at a dead-lock, for Arabella, flattered as she was by Freshfield Sumner's wooing, could not openly throw Edward over, whom indeed she thought that she liked the better of the two, though his letters had not so wide an intellectual range. Her father was irritably anxious that she should close with Edward. Adela could not move: at least, not openly. Cornelia might have taken an initiative; but tenderness for her father's health had hitherto restrained her, and she temporized with Sir Twickenham on the noblest of principles. She was, by the devotion of her conduct, enabled to excuse herself so far that she could even fish up an excuse in the shape of the effort she had made to find him entertaining: as if the said effort should really be re-payment enough to him for his assiduous and most futile suit. One deep

grief sat on Cornelia's mind. She had heard from Lady Gosstre that there was something like madness in the Barrett family. She had consented to meet Sir Purcell clandestinely (after debate on his claim to such a sacrifice on her part), and if, on those occasions, her lover's tone was raised, it gave her a tremour. And he had of late appeared to lose his noble calm; he had spoken (it might almost be interpreted) as if he doubted her. Once, when she had mentioned her care for her father, he had cried out upon the name of father with violence, looking unlike himself.

His condemnation of the world, too, was not so Christian as it had been; it betrayed what the vulgar would call spite, and was not all compassed in his peculiar smooth shrug—expressive of a sort of border-land between contempt and charity: which had made him wear in her sight all the superiority which the former implies, with a considerable share of the benign complacency of the latter. This had gone. He had been sarcastic even to her; saying once, and harshly: "Have you a will?" Personally she liked the poor organist better than the poor baronet, though he had less merit. It was unpleasant in her present mood to be told "that we have come into this life to fashion for ourselves souls;" and that "whosoever cannot decide is a soulless wretch fit but to pass into vapour." He appeared to have ceased to make his generous allowances for difficult situations. A senseless notion struck Cornelia, that with the baronetcy he had perhaps inherited some of the madness of his father.

The two were in a dramatic tangle of the Nice Feelings worth

a glance as we pass on. She wished to say to him, "You are unjust to my perplexities;" and he to her, "You fail in your dilemma through cowardice." Instead of uttering which, they chid themselves severally for entertaining such coarse ideas of their idol. Doubtless they were silent from consideration for one another: but I must add, out of extreme tenderness for themselves likewise. There are people who can keep the facts that front them absent from their contemplation by not framing them in speech; and much benevolence of the passive order may be traced to a disinclination to inflict pain upon oneself. "My duty to my father," being cited by Cornelia, Sir Purcell had to contend with it.

"True love excludes no natural duty," she said.

And he: "Love discerns unerringly what is and what is not duty."

"In the case of a father, can there be any doubt?" she asked, the answer shining in her confident aspect.

"There are many things that fathers may demand of us!" he interjected bitterly.

She had a fatal glimpse here of the false light in which his resentment coloured the relations between fathers and children; and, deeming him incapable of conducting this argument, she felt quite safe in her opposition, up to a point where feeling stopped her.

"Devotedness to a father I must conceive to be a child's first duty," she said.

Sir Purcell nodded: "Yes; a child's!"

"Does not history give the higher praise to children who sacrifice themselves for their parents?" asked Cornelia.

And he replied: "So, you seek to be fortified in such matters by history!"

Courteous sneers silenced her. Feeling told her she was in the wrong; but the beauty of her sentiment was not to be contested, and therefore she thought that she might distrust feeling: and she went against it somewhat; at first very tentatively, for it caused pain. She marked a line where the light of duty should not encroach on the light of our human desires. "But love for a parent is not merely duty," thought Cornelia. "It is also love;—and is it not the least selfish love?"

Step by step Sir Purcell watched the clouding of her mind with false conceits, and knew it to be owing to the heart's want of vigour. Again and again he was tempted to lay an irreverent hand on the veil his lady walked in, and make her bare to herself. Partly in simple bitterness, he refrained: but the chief reason was that he had no comfort in giving a shock to his own state of deception. He would have had to open a dark closet; to disentangle and bring to light what lay in an undistinguishable heap; to disfigure her to herself, and share in her changed eyesight; possibly to be, or seem, coarse: so he kept the door of it locked, admitting sadly in his meditation that there was such a place, and saying all the while: "If I were not poor!" He saw her running into the shelter of egregious sophisms, till it became an effort to him to preserve

his reverence for her and the sex she represented. Finally he imagined that he perceived an idea coming to growth in her, no other than this: "That in duty to her father she might sacrifice herself, though still loving him to whom she had given her heart; thus ennobling her love for father and for lover." With a wicked ingenuity he tracked her forming notions, encouraged them on, and provoked her enthusiasm by putting an ironical question: "Whether the character of the soul was subdued and shaped by the endurance and the destiny of the perishable?"

"Oh! no, no!" she exclaimed. "It cannot be, or what comfort should we have?"

Few men knew better that when lovers' sentiments stray away from feeling, they are to be suspected of a disloyalty. Yet he admired the tone she took. He had got an 'ideal' of her which it was pleasanter to magnify than to distort. An 'ideal' is so arbitrary, that if you only doubt of its being perfection, it will vanish and never come again. Sir Purcell refused to doubt. He blamed himself for having thought it possible to doubt, and this, when all the time he knew.

Through endless labyrinths of delusion these two unhappy creatures might be traced, were it profitable. Down what a vale of little intricate follies should we be going, lighted by one ghastly conclusion! At times, struggling from the midst of her sophisms, Cornelia prayed her lover would claim her openly, and so nerve her to a pitch of energy that would clinch the ruinous debate. Forgetting that she was an 'ideal'—the accredited mistress of

pure wisdom and of the power of deciding rightly— she prayed to be dealt with as a thoughtless person, and one of the herd of women. She felt that Sir Purcell threw too much on her. He expected her to go calmly to her father, and to Sir Twickenham, and tell them individually that her heart was engaged; then with a stately figure to turn, quit the house, and lay her hand in his. He made no allowance for the weakness of her sex, for the difficulties surrounding her, for the consideration due to Sir Twickenham's pride, and to her father's ill- health. She half- protested to herself that he expected from her the mechanical correctness of a machine, and overlooked the fact that she was human. It was a grave comment on her ambition to be an 'ideal.'

So let us leave them, till we come upon the ashy fruit of which this blooming sentimentalism is the seed.

It was past midnight when Mrs. Chump rushed to Arabella's room, and her knock was heard vociferous at the door. The ladies, who were at work upon diaries and letters, allowed her to thump and wonder whether she had come to the wrong door, for a certain period; after which, Arabella placidly unbolted her chamber, and Adela presented herself in the passage to know the meaning of the noise.

"Oh! ye poor darlin's, I've heard ut all, I have."

This commencement took the colour from their cheeks. Arabella invited her inside, and sent Adela for Cornelia.

"Oh, and ye poor deers!" cried Mrs. Chump to Arabella, who remarked: "Pray wait till my sisters come;" causing the woman

to stare and observe: "If ye're not as cold as the bottom of a pot that naver felt fire." She repeated this to Cornelia and Adela as an accusation, and then burst on "My heart's just breakin' for ye, and ye shall naver want bread, eh! and roast beef, and my last bottle of Port ye'll share, though ye've no ideea what a lot o' thoughts o' poor Chump's under that cork, and it'll be a waste on you. Oh! and that monster of a Mr. Paricles that's got ye in his power and's goin' to be the rroon of ye—shame to 'm! Your father's told me; and, oh! my darlin' garls, don't think ut my fault. For, Pole— Pole—"

Mrs. Chump was choked by her grief. The ladies, unbending to some curiosity, eliminated from her gasps and sobs that Mr. Pole had, in the solitude of his library below, accused her of causing the defection of Mr. Pericles, and traced his possible ruin to it, confessing, that in the way of business, he was at Mr. Pericles' mercy.

"And in such a passion with me!" Mrs. Chump wrung her hands. "What could I do to Mr. Paricles? He isn't one o' the men that I can kiss; and Pole shouldn't wish me. And Pole settin' down his rroon to me! What'll I do? My dears! I do feel for ye, for I feel I'd feel myself such a beast, without money, d'ye see? It's the most horrible thing in the world. It's like no candle in the darrk. And I, ye know, I know I'd naver forgive annybody that took my money; and what'll Pole think of me? For oh! ye may call riches temptation, but poverty's punishment; and I heard a young curate say that from the pulpit, and he was lean enough to

know, poor fella!"

Both Cornelia and Arabella breathed more freely when they had heard Mrs. Chump's tale to an end. They knew perfectly well that she was blameless for the defection of Mr. Pericles, and understood from her exclamatory narrative that their father had reason to feel some grave alarm at the Greek's absence from their house, and had possibly reasons of his own for accusing Mrs. Chump, as he had done. The ladies administered consolation to her, telling her that for their part they would never blame her; even consenting to be kissed by her, hugged by her, playfully patted, complimented, and again wept over. They little knew what a fervour of secret devotion they created in Mrs. Chump's bosom by this astounding magnanimity displayed to her, who laboured under the charge of being the source of their ruin; nor could they guess that the little hypocrisy they were practising would lead to any singular and pregnant resolution in the mind of the woman, fraught with explosion to their house, and that quick movement which they awaited.

Mrs. Chump, during the patient strain of a tender hug of Arabella, had mutely resolved in a great heat of gratitude that she would go to Mr. Pericles, and, since he was necessary to the well-being of Brookfield, bring him back, if she had to bring him back in her arms.

CHAPTER XLIII

[Georgiana Ford to Wilfrid:]

"I have omitted replying to your first letter, not because of the nature of its contents: nor do I write now in answer to your second because of the permission you give me to lay it before my brother. I cannot think that concealment is good, save for very base persons; and since you take the initiative in writing very openly, I will do so likewise.

"It is true that Emilia is with me. Her voice is lost, and she has fallen as low in spirit as one can fall and still give us hope of her recovery. But that hope I have, and I am confident that you will not destroy it. In the summer she goes with us to Italy. We have consulted one doctor, who did not prescribe medicine for her. In the morning she reads with my brother. She seems to forget whatever she reads: the occupation is everything necessary just now. Our sharp Monmouth air provokes her to walk briskly when she is out, and the exercise has once or twice given colour to her cheeks. Yesterday being a day of clear frost, we drove to a point from which we could mount the Buckstone, and here, my brother says, the view appeared to give her something of her lost animation. It was a look that I had never seen, and it soon went: but in the evening she asked me whether I prayed before sleeping, and when she retired to her bedroom, I remained there with her for a time.

"You will pardon me for refusing to let her know that you have written to your relative in the Austrian service to obtain a commission for you. But, on the other hand, I have thought it right to tell her incidentally that you will be married in the Summer of this year. I can only say that she listened quite calmly.

"I beg that you will not blame yourself so vehemently. By what you do, her friends may learn to know that you regret the strange effect produced by certain careless words, or conduct: but I cannot find that self-accusation is ever good at all. In answer to your question, I may add that she has repeated nothing of what she said when we were together in Devon.

"Our chief desire (for, as we love her, we may be directed by our instinct), in the attempt to restore her, is to make her understand that she is anything but worthless. She has recently followed my brother's lead, and spoken of herself, but with a touch of scorn. This morning, while the clear frosty sky continues, we were to have started for an old castle lying toward Wales; and I think the idea of a castle must have struck her imagination, and forced some internal contrast on her mind. I am repeating my brother's suggestion—she seemed more than usually impressed with an idea that she was of no value to anybody. She asked why she should go anywhere, and dropped into a chair, begging to be allowed to stay in a darkened room. My brother has some strange intuition of her state of mind. She has lost any power she may have had of grasping abstract ideas. In what I conceived to be play, he told her that many would buy

her even now. She appeared to be speculating on this, and then wished to know how much those persons would consider her to be worth, and who they were. Nor did it raise a smile on her face to hear my brother mention Jews, and name an absolute sum of money; but, on the contrary, after evidently thinking over it, she rose up, and said that she was ready to go. I write fully to you, telling you these things, that you may see she is at any rate eager not to despair, and is learning, much as a child might learn it, that it need not be.

"Believe me, that I will in every way help to dispossess your mind of the remorse now weighing upon you, as far as it shall be within my power to do so.

"Mr. Runnigbrook has been invited by my brother to come and be her companion. They have a strong affection for one another. He is a true poet, full of reverence for a true woman."

[Wilfrid to Georgiana Ford:]

"I cannot thank you enough. When I think of her I am unmanned; and if I let my thoughts fall back upon myself, I am such as you saw me that night in Devon—helpless, and no very presentable figure. But you do not picture her to me. I cannot imagine whether her face has changed; and, pardon me, were I writing to you alone, I could have faith that the delicate insight and angelic nature of a woman would not condemn my desire to realize before my eyes the state she has fallen to. I see her now under a black shroud. Have her features changed? I cannot remember one—only at an interval her eyes. Does she look into

the faces of people as she used? Or does she stare carelessly away? Softly between the eyes, is what I meant. I mean—but my reason for this particularity is very simple. I would state it to you, and to no other. I cannot have peace till she is restored; and my prayer is, that I may not haunt her to defeat your labour. Does her face appear to show that I am quite absent from her thoughts? Oh! you will understand me. You have seen me stand and betray no suffering when a shot at my forehead would have been mercy. To you I will dare to open my heart. I wish to be certain that I have not injured her—that is all. Perhaps I am more guilty than you think: more even than I can call to mind. If I may fudge by the punishment, my guilt is immeasurable. Tell me—if you will but tell me that the sacrifice of my life to her will restore her, it is hers. Write, and say this, and I will come: Do not delay or spare me. Her dumb voice is like a ghost in my ears. It cries to me that I have killed it. Be actuated by no charitable considerations in refraining to write. Could a miniature of her be sent? You will think the request strange; but I want to be sure she is not haggard—not the hospital face I fancy now, which accuses me of murder. Does she preserve the glorious freshness she used to wear? She had a look—or did you see her before the change? I only want to know that she is well."

[Tracy Runningbrook to Wilfrid:]

"You had my promise that I would write and give your conscience a nightcap. I have a splendid one for you. Put it on without any hesitation. I find her quite comfortable. Powys

reads Italian with her in the morning. His sister (who might be a woman if she liked, but has an insane preference for celestial neutrality) does the moral inculcation. The effect is comical. I should like you to see Cold Steel leading Tame Fire about, and imagining the taming to be her work! You deserve well of your generation. You just did enough to set this darling girl alight. Knights and squires numberless will thank you. The idea of your reproaching yourself is monstrous. Why, there's no one thanks you more than she does. You stole her voice, which some may think a pity, but I don't, seeing that I would rather have her in a salon than before the footlights. Imagine my glory in her!—she has become half cat! She moves softly, as if she loved everything she touched; making you throb to feel the little ball of her foot. Her eyes look steadily, like green jewels before the veil of an Egyptian temple. Positively, her eyes have grown green—or greenish! They were darkish hazel formerly, and talked more of milkmaids and chattering pastorals than a discerning master would have wished. Take credit for the change; and at least I don't blame you for the tender hollows under the eyes, sloping outward, just hinted... Love's mark on her, so that men's hearts may faint to know that love is known to her, and burn to read her history. When she is about to speak, the upper lids droop a very little; or else the under lids quiver upward— I know not which. Take further credit for her manner. She has now a manner of her own. Some of her naturalness has gone, but she has skipped clean over the 'young lady' stage; from raw girl she has really got

as much of the great manner as a woman can have who is not an ostensibly retired dowager, or a matron on a pedestal shuffling the naked virtues and the decorous vices together. She looks at you with an immense, marvellous gravity, before she replies to you—enveloping you in a velvet light. This, is fact, not fine stuff, my dear fellow. The light of her eyes does absolutely cling about you. Adieu! You are a great master, and know exactly when to make your bow and retire. A little more, and you would have spoiled her. Now she is perfect."

[Wilfrid to Tracy Runningbrook:]

"I have just come across a review of your last book, and send it, thinking you may wish to see it. I have put a query to one of the passages, which I think misquoted: and there will be no necessity to call your attention to the critic's English. You can afford to laugh at it, but I confess it puts your friends in a rage. Here are a set of fellows who arm themselves with whips and stand in the public thoroughfare to make any man of real genius run the gauntlet down their ranks till he comes out flayed at the other extremity! What constitutes their right to be there?—By the way, I met Sir Purcell Barrett (the fellow who was at Hillford), and he would like to write an article on you that should act as a sort of rejoinder. You won't mind, of course—it's bread to him, poor devil! I doubt whether I shall see you when you come back, so write a jolly lot of letters. Colonel Pierson, of the Austrian army, my uncle (did you meet him at Brookfield?), advises me to sell out immediately. He is getting me an Imperial commission—

cavalry. I shall give up the English service. And if they want my medal, they can have it, and I'll begin again. I'm sick of everything except a cigar and a good volume of poems. Here's to light one, and now for the other!

"Large eyes lit up by some imperial sin," etc.

(Ten lines from Tracy's book are here copied neatly.)

[Tracy Runningbrook to Wilfrid:]

"Why the deuce do you write me such infernal trash about the opinions of a villanous dog who can't even en a decent sentence? I've been damning you for a white-livered Austrian up and down the house. Let the fellow bark till he froths at the mouth, and scatters the virus of the beast among his filthy friends. I am mad-dog proof. The lines you quote were written in an awful hurry, coming up in the train from Richford one morning. You have hit upon my worst with commendable sagacity. If it will put money in Barren's pocket, let him write. I should prefer to have nothing said. The chances are all in favour of his writing like a fool. If you're going to be an Austrian, we may have a chance of shooting one another some day, so here's my hand before you go and sell your soul; and anything I can do in the meantime—command me."

[Georgiana Ford to Wilfrid:]

"I do not dare to charge you with a breach of your pledged word. Let me tell you simply that Emilia has become aware of your project to enter the Austrian service, and it has had the effect on her which I foresaw. She could bear to hear of your marriage,

but this is too much for her, and it breaks my heart to see her. It is too cruel. She does not betray any emotion, but I can see that every principle she had gained is gone, and that her bosom holds the shadows of a real despair. I foresaw it, and sought to guard her against it. That you, whom she had once called (to me) her lover, should enlist himself as an enemy, of her country!—it comes to her as a fact striking her brain dumb while she questions it, and the poor body has nothing to do but to ache. Surely you could have no object in doing this? I will not suspect it. Mr. Runningbrook is acquainted with your plans, I believe; but he has no remembrance of having mentioned this one to Emilia. He distinctly assures me that he has not done so, and I trust him to speak truth. How can it have happened? But here is the evil done. I see no remedy. I am not skilled in sketching the portraits you desire of her, and yet, if you have ever wished her to know this miserable thing, it would be as well that you should see the different face that has come among us within twenty hours."

[Wilfrid to Georgiana Ford:]

"I will confine my reply to a simple denial of having caused this fatal intelligence to reach her ears; for the truth of which, I pledge my honour as a gentleman. A second's thought would have told me—indeed I at once acquiesced in your view—that she should not know it. How it has happened it is vain to attempt to guess. Can you suppose that I desired her to hate me? Yet this is what the knowledge of the step I am taking will make her do! If I could see—if I might see her for five minutes, I should

be able to explain everything, and, I sincerely think (painful as it would be to me), give her something like peace. It is too late even to wish to justify myself; but her I can persuade that she — Do you not see that her mind is still unconvinced of my — I will call it baseness! Is this the self-accusing you despise? A little of it must be heard. If I may see her I will not fail to make her understand my position. She shall see that it is I who am worthless—not she! You know the circumstances under which I last beheld her—when I saw pang upon pang smiting her breast from my silence! But now I may speak. Do not be prepossessed against my proposal! It shall be only for five minutes—no more. Not that it is my desire to come. In truth, it could not be. I have felt that I alone can cure her—I who did the harm. Mark me: she will fret secretly—, but dear and kindest lady, do not smile too critically at the tone I adopt. I cannot tell how I am writing or what saying. Believe me that I am deeply and constantly sensible of your generosity. In case you hesitate, I beg you to consult Mr. Powys."

[Georgiana Ford to Wilfrid:]

"I had no occasion to consult my brother to be certain that an interview between yourself and Emilia should not take place. There can be no object, even if the five minutes of the meeting gave her happiness, why the wound of the long parting should be again opened. She is wretched enough now, though her tenderness for us conceals it as far as possible. When some heavenly light shall have penetrated her, she will have a chance of

peace. The evil is not of a nature to be driven out by your hands. If you are not going into the Austrian service, she shall know as much immediately. Otherwise, be as dead to her as you may, and your noblest feelings cannot be shown under any form but that."

[Wilfrid to Tracy Runningbrook:]

"Some fellows whom I know want you to write a prologue to a play they are going to get up. It's about Shakespeare—at least, the proceeds go to something of that sort. Do, like a good fellow, toss us off twenty lines. Why don't you write? By the way, I hope there's no truth in a report that has somehow reached me, that they have the news down in Monmouth of my deserting to the black-yellow squadrons? Of course, such a thing as that should have been kept from them. I hear, too, that your— I suppose I must call her now your—pupil is falling into bad health. Think me as cold and 'British' as you like; but the thought of this does really affect me painfully. Upon my honour, it does! 'And now he yawns!' you're saying. You're wrong. We Army men feel just as you poets do, and for a longer time, I think, though perhaps not so acutely. I send you the 'Venus' cameo which you admired. Pray accept it from an old friend. I mayn't see you again."

[Tracy Runningbrook to Wilfrid:] (enclosing lines)

"Here they are. It will require a man who knows something about metre to speak them. Had Shakespeare's grandmother three Christian names? and did she anticipate feminine posterity in her rank of life by saying habitually, 'Drat it?' There is as yet no Society to pursue this investigation, but it should be

started. Enormous thanks for the Venus. I wore it this morning at breakfast. Just as we were rising, I leaned forward to her, and she jumped up with her eyes under my chin. 'Isn't she a beauty?' I said. 'It was his,' she answered, changing eyes of eagle for eyes of dove, and then put out the lights. I had half a mind to offer it, on the spot. May I? That is to say, if the impulse seizes me I take nobody's advice, and fair Venus certainly is not under my chin at this moment. As to ill health, great mother Nature has given a house of iron to this soul of fire. The windows may blaze, or the windows may be extinguished, but the house stands firm. When you are lightning or earthquake, you may have something to reproach yourself for; as it is, be under no alarm. Do not put words in my mouth that I have not uttered. 'And now he yawns,' is what I shall say of you only when I am sure you have just heard a good thing. You really are the best fellow of your set that I have come across, and the only one pretending to brains. Your modesty in estimating your value as a leader of Pandours will be pleasing to them who like that modesty. Good-bye. This little Emilia is a marvel of flying moods. Yesterday she went about as if she said, 'I've promised Apollo not to speak till to-morrow.' To-day, she's in a feverish gabble—or began the day with a burst of it; and now she's soft and sensible. If you fancy a girl at her age being able to see, that it's a woman's duty to herself and the world to be artistic—to perfect the thing of beauty she is meant to be by nature!—and, seeing, too, that Love is an instrument like any other thing, and that we must play on it with considerate

gentleness, and that tearing at it or dashing it to earth, making it howl and quiver, is madness, and not love!—I assure you she begins to see it! She does see it. She is going to wear a wreath of black briony (preserved and set by Miss Ford, a person cunning in these matters). She's going to the ball at Penarvon Castle, and will look— supply your favourite slang word. A little more experience, and she will have malice. She wants nothing but that to make her consummate. Malice is the barb of beauty. She's just at present a trifle blunt. She will knock over, but not transfix. I am anxious to watch the effect she produces at Penarvon. Poor little woman! I paid a compliment to her eyes. 'I've got nothing else,' said she. Dine as well as you can while you are in England. German cookery is an education for the sentiment of hogs. The play of sour and sweet, and crowning of the whole with fat, shows a people determined to go down in civilization, and try the business backwards. Adieu, curst Croat! On the Wallachian border mayst thou gather philosophy from meditation."

CHAPTER XLIV

Dexterously as Wilfrid has turned Tracy to his uses by means of the foregoing correspondence, in doing so he had exposed himself to the retributive poison administered by that cunning youth. And now the Hippogriff seized him, and mounted with him into mid-air; not as when the idle boy Ganymede was caught up to act as cup-bearer in celestial Courts, but to plunge about on yielding vapours, with nothing near him save the voice of his desire.

The Philosopher here peremptorily demands the pulpit. We are subject, he says, to fantastic moods, and shall dry ready-minted phrases picture them forth? As, for example, can the words 'delirium,' or 'frenzy,' convey an image of Wilfrid's state, when his heart began to covet Emilia again, and his sentiment not only interposed no obstacle, but trumpeted her charms and fawned for her, and he thought her lost, remembered that she had been his own, and was ready to do any madness to obtain her? 'Madness' is the word that hits the mark, but it does not fully embrace the meaning. To be in this state, says the Philosopher, is to be 'On The Hippogriff;' and to this, as he explains, the persons who travel to Love by the road of sentiment will come, if they have any stuff in them, and if the one who kindles them is mighty. He distinguishes being on the Hippogriff from being possessed by passion. Passion, he says, is noble strength on fire,

and points to Emilia as a representation of passion. She asks for what she thinks she may have; she claims what she imagines to be her own. She has no shame, and thus, believing in, she never violates, nature, and offends no law, wild as she may seem. Passion does not turn on her and rend her when it is thwarted. She was never carried out of the limit of her own intelligent force, seeing that it directed her always, with the simple mandate to seek that which belonged to her. She was perfectly sane, and constantly just to herself, until the failure of her voice, telling her that she was a beggar in the world, came as a second blow, and partly scared her reason. Constantly just to herself, mind! This is the quality of true passion. Those who make a noise, and are not thus distinguishable, are on Hippogriff.

—By which it is clear to me that my fantastic Philosopher means to indicate the lover mounted in this wise, as a creature bestriding an extraneous power. "The sentimentalist," he says, "goes on accumulating images and hiving sensations, till such time as (if the stuff be in him) they assume a form of vitality, and hurry him headlong. This is not passion, though it amazes men, and does the madder thing."

In fine, it is Hippogriff. And right loath am I to continue my partnership with a fellow who will not see things on the surface, and is, as a necessary consequence, blind to the fact that the public detest him. I mean, this garrulous, super-subtle, so-called Philosopher, who first set me upon the building of 'The Three Volumes,' it is true, but whose stipulation that he should occupy

so large a portion of them has made them rock top-heavy, to the forfeit of their stability. He maintains that a story should not always flow, or, at least, not to a given measure. When we are knapsack on back, he says, we come to eminences where a survey of our journey past and in advance is desirable, as is a distinct pause in any business, here and there. He points proudly to the fact that our people in this comedy move themselves,—are moved from their own impulsion,—and that no arbitrary hand has posted them to bring about any event and heap the catastrophe. In vain I tell him that he is meantime making tatters of the puppets' golden robe illusion: that he is sucking the blood of their warm humanity out of them. He promises that when Emilia is in Italy he will retire altogether; for there is a field of action, of battles and conspiracies, nerve and muscle, where life fights for plain issues, and he can but sum results. Let us, he entreats, be true to time and place. In our fat England, the gardener Time is playing all sorts of delicate freaks in the lines and traceries of the flower of life, and shall we not note them? If we are to understand our species, and mark the progress of civilization at all, we must. Thus the Philosopher. Our partner is our master, and I submit, hopefully looking for release with my Emilia, in the day when Italy reddens the sky with the banners of a land revived.

I hear Wilfrid singing out that he is aloft, burning to rush ahead, while his beast capers in one spot, abominably ludicrous. This trick of Hippogriff is peculiar, viz., that when he loses

all faith in himself, he sinks—in other words, goes to excesses of absurd humility to regain it. Passion has likewise its panting intervals, but does nothing so preposterous. The wreath of black briony, spoken of by Tracy as the crown of Emilia's forehead, had begun to glow with a furnace-colour in Wilfrid's fancy. It worked a Satanic distraction in him. The girl sat before him swathed in a darkness, with the edges of the briony leaves shining deadly—radiant above—*young Hecate!* The next instant he was bleeding with pity for her, aching with remorse, and again stung to intense jealousy of all who might behold her (amid a reserve of angry sensations at her present happiness).

Why had she not made allowance for his miserable situation that night in Devon? Why did she not comprehend his difficulties in relation to his father's affairs? Why did she not know that he could not fail to love her for ever?

Interrogations such as these were so many switches of the whip in the flanks of Hippogriff.

Another peculiarity of the animal gifted with wings is, that around the height he soars to he can see no barriers nor any of the fences raised by men. And here again he differs from Passion, which may tug against common sense but is never, in a great nature, divorced from it: In air on Hippogriff, desires wax boundless, obstacles are hidden. It seemed nothing to Wilfrid (after several tremendous descents of humility) that he should hurry for Monmouth away, to gaze on Emilia under her fair, infernal, bewitching wreath; nothing that he should put an arm

round her; nothing that he should forthwith carry her off, though he died for it. Forming no design beyond that of setting his eyes on her, he turned the head of Hippogriff due Westward.

CHAPTER XLV

Penarvon castle lay over the borders of Monmouthshire. Thither, on a night of frosty moonlight, troops of carriages were hurrying with the usual freightage for a country ball:— the squire who will not make himself happy by seeing that his duty to the softer side of his family must be performed during the comfortable hours when bachelors snooze in arm-chairs, and his nobler dame who, not caring for Port or tobacco, cheerfully accepts the order of things as bequeathed to her: the everlastingly half-satisfied young man, who looks forward to the hour when his cigar-light will shine; and the damsel thrice demure as a cover for her eagerness. Within a certain distance of one of the carriages, a man rode on horseback. The court of the castle was reached, and he turned aside, lingering to see whether he could get a view of the lighted steps. To effect his object, he dismounted and led his horse through the gates, turning from gravel to sward, to keep in the dusk. A very agile middle-aged gentleman was the first to appear under the portico-lamps, and he gave his hand to a girl of fifteen, and then to a most portly lady in a scarlet mantle. The carriage-door slammed and drove off, while a groan issued from the silent spectator. "Good heavens! have I followed these horrible people for five-and-twenty miles!" Carriage after carriage rattled up to the steps, was disburdened of still more 'horrible people' to him, and went the way of the others. "I shan't

see her, after all," he cried hoarsely, and mounting, said to the beast that bore him, "Now go sharp."

Whether you recognize the rider of Hippogriff or not, this is he; and the poor livery-stable screw stretched madly till wind failed, when he was allowed to choose his pace. Wilfrid had come from London to have sight of Emilia in the black-briony wreath: to see her, himself unseen, and go. But he had not seen her; so he had the full excuse to continue the adventure. He rode into a Welsh town, and engaged a fresh horse for the night.

"She won't sing, at all events," thought Wilfrid, to comfort himself, before the memory that she could not, in any case, touched springs of weakness and pitying tenderness. From an eminence to which he walked outside the town, Penarvon was plainly visible with all its lighted windows.

"But I will pluck her from you!" he muttered, in a spasm of jealousy; the image of himself as an outcast against the world that held her, striking him with great force at that moment.

"I must give up the Austrian commission, if she takes me."

And be what? For he had sold out of the English service, and was to receive the money in a couple of days. How long would the money support him? It would not pay half his debts! What, then, did this pursuit of Emilia mean? To blink this question, he had to give the spur to Hippogriff. It meant (upon Hippogriff at a brisk gallop), that he intended to live for her, die for her, if need be, and carve out of the world all that she would require. Everything appears possible, on Hippogriff, when he is going; but it is a bad

business to put the spur on so willing a beast. When he does not go of his own will;—when he sees that there are obstructions, it is best to jump off his back. And we should abandon him then, save that having once tasted what he can do for us, we become enamoured of the habit of going keenly, and defying obstacles. Thus do we begin to corrupt the uses of the gallant beast (for he is a gallant beast, though not of the first order); we spoil his instincts and train him to hurry us to perdition.

"If my sisters could see me now!" thought Wilfrid, half-smitten with a distant notion of a singularity in his position there, the mark for a frosty breeze, while his eyes kept undeviating watch over Penarvon.

After a time he went back to the inn, and got among coachmen and footmen, all battling lustily against the frost with weapons scientifically selected at the bar. They thronged the passages, and lunged hearty punches at one another, drank and talked, and only noticed that a gentleman was in their midst when he moved to get a light. One complained that he had to drive into Monmouth that night, by a road that sent him five miles out of his way, owing to a block—a great stone that had fallen from the hill. "You can't ask 'em to get out and walk ten steps," he said; "or there! I'd lead the horses and just tip up the off wheels, and round the place in a twinkle, pop 'm in again, and nobody hurt; but you can't ask ladies to risk catchin' colds for the sake of the poor horses."

Several coachmen spoke upon this, and the shame and marvel it was that the stone had not been moved; and between them

the name of Mr. Powys was mentioned, with the remark that he would spare his beasts if he could.

"What's that block you're speaking of, just out of Monmouth?" enquired Wilfrid; and it being described to him, together with the exact bearings of the road and situation of the mass of stone, he at once repeated a part of what he had heard in the form of the emphatic interrogation, "What! there?" and flatly told the coachman that the stone had been moved.

"It wasn't moved this morning, then, sir," said the latter.

"No; but a great deal can be done in a couple of hours," said Wilfrid.

"Did you see 'em at work, sir?"

"No; but I came that way, and the road was clear."

"The deuce it was!" ejaculated the coachman, willingly convinced.

"And that's the way I shall return," added Wilfrid.

He tossed some money on the bar to aid in warming the assemblage, and received numerous salutes as he passed out. His heart was beating fast. "I shall see her, in the teeth of my curst luck," he thought, picturing to himself the blessed spot where the mass of stone would lie; and to that point he galloped, concentrating all the light in his mind on this maddest of chances, till it looked sound, and finally certain.

"It's certain, if that's not a hired coachman," he calculated. "If he is, he won't risk his fee. If he isn't, he'll feel on the safe side anyhow. At any rate, it's my only chance." And away he flew

between glimmering slopes of frost to where a white curtain of mist hung across the wooded hills of the Wye.

CHAPTER XLVI

Emilia was in skilful hands, and against anything less powerful than a lover mounted upon Hippogriff, might have been shielded. What is poison to most girls, Merthyr prescribed for her as medicine. He nourished her fainting spirit upon vanity. In silent astonishment Georgiana heard him address speeches to her such as dowagers who have seen their day can alone of womankind complacently swallow. He encouraged Tracy Runningbrook to praise the face of which she had hitherto thought shyly. Jewels were placed at her disposal, and dresses laid out cunningly suited to her complexion. She had a maid to wait on her, who gabbled at the momentous hours of robing and unrobing: "Oh, miss! of all the dark young ladies I ever see!"—Emilia was the most bewitching. By-and-by, Emilia was led to think of herself; but with a struggle and under protest. How could it be possible that she was so very nice to the eye, and Wilfrid had abandoned her? The healthy spin of young new blood turned the wheels of her brain, and then she thought: "Perhaps I am really growing handsome?" The maid said artfully of her hair: "If gentlemen could only see it down, miss! It's the longest, and thickest, and blackest, I ever touched!" And so saying, slid her fingers softly through it after the comb, and thrilled the owner of that hair till soft thoughts made her bosom heave, and then self-love began to be sensibly awakened, followed by self-pity, and some further

form of what we understand as consciousness. If partially a degradation of her nature, this saved her mind from true despair when it began to stir after the vital shock that had brought her to earth. "To what purpose should I be fair?" was a question that did not yet come to her; but it was sweet to see Merthyr's eyes gather pleasure from the light of her own. Sweet, though nothing more than coldly sweet. She compared herself to her father's old broken violin, that might be mended to please the sight; but would never give the tones again. Sometimes, if hope tormented her, she would strangle it by trying her voice: and such a little piece of self-inflicted anguish speedily undid all Merthyr's work. He was patient as one who tends a flower in the Spring. Georgiana marvelled that the most sensitive and proud of men should be striving to uproot an image from the heart of a simple girl, that he might place his own there. His methods almost led her to think that his estimate of human nature was falling low. Nevertheless, she was constrained to admit that there was no diminution of his love for her, and it chastened her to think so. "Would it be the same with me, if I—?" she half framed the sentence, blushing remorsefully while she denied that anything could change her great love for her brother. She had caught a glimpse of Wilfrid's suppleness and selfishness. Contrasting him with Merthyr, she was singularly smitten with shame, she knew not why.

The anticipation of the ball at Penarvon Castle had kindled very little curiosity in Emilia's bosom. She seemed to herself a

machine; "one of the rest;" and looked more to see that she was still coveted by Merthyr's eyes than at the glitter of the humming saloons. A touch of her old gladness made her smile when Captain Gambier unexpectedly appeared and walked across the dancers to sit beside her. She asked him why he had come from London: to which he replied, with a most expressive gaze under her eyelids, that he had come for one object. "To see me?" thought Emilia, wondering, and reddening as she ceased to wonder. She had thought as a child, and the neat instant felt as a woman. He finished Merthyr's work for him. Emilia now thought: "Then I must be worth something." And with "I am," she ended her meditation, glowing. He might have said that she had all beauty ever showered upon woman: she would have been led to believe him at that moment of her revival.

Now, Lady Charlotte had written to Georgiana, telling her that Captain Gambier was soon to be expected in her neighbourhood, and adding that it would be as well if she looked closely after her charge. When Georgiana saw him go over to Emilia she did not remember this warning: but when she perceived the sudden brilliancy and softness in Emilia's face after the first words had fallen on her ears, she grew alarmed, knowing his reputation, and executed some diversions, which separated them. The captain made no effort to perplex her tactics, merely saying that he should call in a day or two. Merthyr took to himself all the credit of the visible bloom that had come upon Emilia, and pacing with her between the dances, said: "Now you will come to Italy, I think."

She paused before answering, "Now?" and feverishly continued: "Yes; at once. I will go. I have almost felt my voice again to-night."

"That's well. I shall write to Marini to-morrow. You will soon find your voice if you will not fret for it. Touch Italy!"

"Yes; but you must be near me," said Emilia.

Georgiana heard this, and could not conceive other than that Emilia was growing to be one of those cormorant creatures who feed alike on the homage of noble and ignoble. She was critical, too, of that very assured pose of Emilia's head and firm planting of her feet as the girl paraded the room after the dances in which she could not join. Previous to this evening, Georgiana had seen nothing of the sort in her; but, on the contrary, a doubtful droop of the shoulders and an unwilling gaze, as of a soul submerged in internal hesitations. "I earnestly trust that this is a romantic folly of Merthyr's, and no more," thought Georgiana, who would have had that view concerning his love for Italy likewise, if recollection of her own share of adventure there had not softly interposed.

Tracy, Georgiana, Merthyr, and Emilia were in the carriage, well muffled up, with one window open to the white mist. Emilia was eager to thank her friend, if only for the physical relief from weariness and sluggishness which she was experiencing. She knew certainly that the dim light of a recovering confidence in herself was owing, all, to him, and burned to thank him. Once on the way their hands touched, and he felt a shy pressure from her

fingers as they parted. Presently the carriage stopped abruptly, and listening they heard the coachman indulge his companion outside with the remark that they were a couple of fools, and were now regularly 'dished.'

"I don't see why that observation can't go on wheels," said Tracy.

Merthyr put out his head, and saw the obstruction of the mass of stone across the road. He alighted, and together with the footman, examined the place to see what the chance was of their getting the carriage past. After a space of waiting, Georgiana clutched the wraps about her throat and head, and impetuously followed her brother, as her habit had always been. Emilia sat upright, saying, "I must go too." Tracy moaned a petition to her to rest and be comfortable while the Gods were propitious. He checked her with his arm, and tried to pacify her by giving a description of the scene. The coachman remained on his seat. Merthyr, Georgiana, and the footman were on the other side of the rock, measuring the place to see whether, by a partial ascent of the sloping rubble down which it had bowled, the carriage might be got along.

"Go; they have gone round; see whether we can give any help," said Emilia to Tracy, who cried: "My goodness! what help can we give? This is an express situation where the Fates always appear in person and move us on. We're sure to be moved, if we show proper faith in them. This is my attitude of invocation." He curled his legs up on the seat, resting his head on an arm; but seeing

Emilia preparing for a jump he started up, and immediately preceded her. Emilia looked out after him. She perceived a figure coming stealthily from the bank. It stopped, and again advanced, and now ran swiftly down. She drew back her head as it approached the open door of the carriage; but the next moment trembled forward, and was caught with a cat-like clutch upon Wilfrid's breast.

"Emilia! my own for ever! I swore to die this night if I did not see you!"

"You love me, Wilfrid? love me?"

"Come with me now!"

"Now?"

"Away! with me! your lover!"

"Then you love me!"

"I love you! Come!"

"Now? I cannot move."

"I am out in the night without you."

"Oh, my lover! Oh, Wilfrid!"

"Come to me!"

"My feet are dead!"

"It's too late!"

A sturdy hulloa! sounding from the coachman made Merthyr's ears alive. When he returned he found Emilia huddled up on the seat, alone, her face in her hands, and the touch of her hands like fire. He had to entreat her to descend, and in helping her to alight bore her whole weight, and supported her in a sad wonder, while

the horses were led across the rubble, and the carriage was with difficulty, and some confusions, guided to clear its wheels of the obstructing mass. Emilia persisted in saying that nothing ailed her; and to the coachman, who could have told him something, and was willing to have done so (notwithstanding a gold fee for silence that stuck in his palm), Merthyr put no question.

As they were taking their seats in the carriage again, Georgiana said,

"Where is your wreath, Sandra?"

The black-briony wreath was no longer on her head.

"Then, it wasn't a dream!" gasped Emilia, feeling at her temples.

Georgiana at once fell into a scrutinizing coldness, and when Merthyr, who fancied the wreath might have fallen as he was lifting Emilia from the carriage, proposed to go and search the place for it, his sister laid her fingers on his arm, remarking, "You will not find it, dear;" and Emilia cried "Oh! no, no! it is not there;" and, with her hands pressed hard against her bosom, sat fixed and silent.

Out of this mood she issued with looks of such tenderness that one who watched her, speculating on her character as Merthyr did, could see that in some mysterious way she had been, during the few minutes that separated them, illumined upon the matter nearest her heart. Was it her own strength, inspired by some sublime force, that had sprung up suddenly to eject a worthless love? So he hoped in despite of whispering reason, till Georgiana

spoke to him.

CHAPTER XLVII

When the force of Wilfrid's embrace had died out from her body, Emilia conceived wilfully that she had seen an apparition, so strange, sudden, and wild had been his coming and going: but her whole body was a song to her. "He is not false: he is true." So dimly, however, was the 'he' now fashioned in her brain, and so like a thing of the air had he descended on her, that she almost conceived the abstract idea, 'Love is true,' and possibly, though her senses did not touch on it to shape it, she had the reflection in her: "After all, power is mine to bring him to my side." Almost it seemed to her that she had brought him from the grave. She sat hugging herself in the carriage, hating to hear words, and seeing a ball of fire away in the white mist. Georgiana looked at her no more; and when Tracy remarked that he had fancied having seen a fellow running up the bank, she said quietly, "Did you?"

"Robert must have seen him, too," added Merthyr, and so the interloper was dismissed.

On reaching home, no sooner were they in the hall than Emilia called for her bedroom candle in a thin, querulous voice that made Tracy shout with laughter and love of her quaintness.

Emilia gave him her hand, and held up her mouth to kiss Georgiana, but no cheek was bent forward for the salute. The girl passed from among them, and then Merthyr said to his sister: "What is the matter?"

"Surely, Merthyr, you should not be at a loss," she answered, in a somewhat unusual tone, that was half irony.

Merthyr studied her face. Alone with her, he said: "I could almost suppose that she has seen this man."

Georgiana smiled sadly. "I have not seen him, dear; and she has not told me so."

"You think it was so?"

"I can imagine it just possible."

"What! while we were out and had left her! He must be mad!"

"Not necessarily mad, unless to be without principle is to be mad."

"Mad, or graduating for a Spanish comedie d'intrigue," said Merthyr. "What on earth can he mean by it? If he must see her, let him come here. But to dog a carriage at midnight, and to prefer to act startling surprises!—one can't help thinking that he delights in being a stage- hero."

Georgiana's: "If he looks on her as a stage-heroine?" was unheeded, and he pursued: "She must leave England at once," and stated certain arrangements that were immediately to be made.

"You will not give up this task you have imposed on yourself?" she said.

"To do what?"

She could have answered: "To make this unsatisfactory creature love you;" but her words were, "To civilize this little savage."

Merthyr was bright in a moment: "I don't give up till I see failure."

"Is it not possible, dear, to be dangerously blind?" urged Georgiana.

"Keep to the particular case," he returned; "and don't tempt me into your woman's snare of a generalization. It's possible, of course, to be one-ideaed and obstinate. But I have not yet seen your savage guilty of a deceit. Her heart has been stirred, and her heart, as you may judge, has force enough to be constant, though none can deny that it has been roughly proved."

"For which you like her better?" said Georgiana, herself brightening.

"For which I like her better," he replied, and smiled, perfectly armed.

"Oh! is it because I am a woman that I do not understand this sort of friendship?" cried Georgiana. "And from you, Merthyr, to a girl such as she is! Me she satisfies less and less. You speak of force of heart, as if it were manifested in an abandonment of personal will."

"No, my darling, but in the strong conception of a passion."

"Yes; if she had discriminated, and fixed upon a worthy object!"

"That," rejoined Merthyr, "is akin to the doctrine of justification by success."

"You seek to foil me with sophisms," said Georgiana, warming. "A woman—even a girl—should remember what is

due to herself. You are attracted by a passionate nature—I mean, men are."

"The general instance," assented Merthyr.

"Then, do you never reflect," pursued Georgiana, "on the composition and the elements of that sort of nature? I have tried to think the best of it. It seems to me still no, not contemptible at all—but selfishness is the groundwork of it; a brilliant selfishness, I admit. I see that it shows its best feature, but is it the nobler for that? I think, and I must think, that excellence is a point to be reached only by unselfishness, and that usefulness is the test of excellence."

"Before there has been any trial of her?" asked Merthyr. "Have you not been a little too eager to put the test to her?"

Georgiana reluctantly consented to have her argument attached to a single person. "She is not a child, Merthyr."

"Ay; but she should bethought one."

"I confess I am utterly at sea," Georgiana sighed. "Will you at least allow that sordid selfishness does less mischief than this 'passion' you admire so much?"

"I will allow that she may do herself more mischief than if she had the opposite vice of avarice—anything you will, of that complexion."

"And why should she be regarded as a child?" asked Georgiana piteously.

"Because, if she has outnumbered the years of a child, she is no further advanced than a child, owing to what she has to get rid

of. She is overburdened with sensations that set her head on fire. Her solid, firm, and gentle heart keeps her balanced, so long as there is no one playing on it. That a fool should be doing so, is scarcely her fault."

Georgiana murmured to herself, "He is not a fool." She said, "I do see a certain truth in what you say, dear Merthyr. But I have been disappointed in her. I have taken her among my poor. She listens to their tales, without sympathy. I took her into a sick-room. She stood by a dying bed like a statue. Her remark when we came into the air was, 'Death seems easy, if it were not so stifling!' Herself always! herself the centre of what she sees and feels! And again, she has no active desire to do good to any mortal thing. A passive wish that everybody should be happy, I know she has. Few have not. She would give money if she had it. But this is among the mysteries of Providence to me, that one no indifferent to others should be gifted with so inexplicable a power of attraction."

Merthyr put this case to her: "Suppose you saw any of the poor souls you wait on lying sick with fever, would it be just to describe the character of one so situated as fretful, ungrateful, of rambling tongue, poor in health, and generally of loose condition of mind?"

"There, again, is that foreign doctrine which exults in the meanest triumphs by getting the thesis granted that we are animal—only animals!" Georgiana burst out. You argue that at this season and at that season she is helpless. If she is a human

creature, must she not have a mind to cover those conditions?"

"And a mind," Merthyr took her up, "specially experienced, armed, and alert to be a safeguard to her at the most critical period of her life! Oh, yes! Whether she 'must' have it is one thing; but no one can content the value of such a jewel to any young person."

Georgiana stood silenced; and knew later that she had been silenced by a fallacy. For, is youth the most critical period of life? Neither brother nor sister, however, were talking absolutely for the argument. Beneath this dialogue, the current in her mind pressed to elicit some avowal of his personal feeling for the girl, toward whom Georgiana's disposition was kindlier than her words might lead one to think. He, on the other hand, talked with the distinct object of disguising his feelings under a tone of moderate friendship for Emilia, that was capable of excusing her. A sensitive man of thirty odd years does not loudly proclaim his appreciation of a girl under twenty: moreover, Merthyr wished to spare his sister.

He thought of questioning Robert, the coachman, whether anyone had visited the carriage during his five minutes' absence from it: but Merthyr's peculiar Welsh delicacy kept him from doing that, hard as it was to remain in doubt and endure the little poisoned shafts of a suspicion.

In the morning there was a letter from Marini on the breakfast-table. Merthyr glanced down the contents. His countenance flashed with a marvellous light. "Where is she?" he said, looking

keenly for Emilia.

Emilia came in from the garden.

"Now, my Sandra!" cried Merthyr, waving the letter to her; "can you pack up, to start in an hour? There's work coming on for us, and I shall be a boy again, and not the drumstick I am in this country. I have a letter from Marini. All Lombardy is prepared to rise, and this time the business will be done. Marini is off for Genoa. Under the orange-trees, my Sandra! and looking on the bay, singing of Italy free!"

Emilia fell back a step, eyeing him with a grave expression of wonder, as if she beheld another being from the one she had hitherto known. The calm Englishman had given place to a volcanic spirit.

"Isn't that the sketch we made?" he resumed. "The plot's perfect. I detest conspiracies, but we must use what weapons we can, and be Old Mole, if they trample us in the earth. Once up, we have Turin to back us. This I know. We shall have nothing but the Tedeschi to manage: and if they beat us in cavalry, it's certain that they can't rely on their light horse. The Magyars would break in a charge. We know that they will. As for the rest:—

'Soldati settentrionali,
Come sarebbe Boemi a Croati,'

we are a match for them! Artillery we shall get. The Piedmontese are mad for the signal. Come; sit and eat. The air

seems dead down in this quiet country; we're out of the stream. I must rush up to London to breathe and then we won't lose a moment. We shall be in Italy in four days. Four days, my Sandra! And Italy going to be free; Georgey, I'm fasting. And you will see all your old friends. All? Good God! No!— not all! Their blood shall nerve us. The Austrian thinks he wastes us by slaughter. With every dead man he doubles the life of the living! Am I talking like a foreigner, Sandra mia? My child, you don't eat! And I, who dreamed last night that I looked out over Novara from the height of the Col di Colma, and saw the plain under a red shadow from a huge eagle!"

Merthyr laughed, swinging round his arm. Emilia continued staring at him as at a man transformed, while Georgiana asked: "May Marini's letter be seen?" Her visage had become firm and set in proportion as her brother's excitement increased.

"Eat, my Sandra! eat!" called Merthyr, who was himself eating with a campaigning appetite.

Georgiana laid down the letter folded under Merthyr's fingers, keeping her hand on it till he grew alive to her meaning, that it should be put away.

"Marini is vague about artillery," she murmured.

"Vague!" echoed Merthyr. "Say prudent. If he said we could lay hands on fifty pieces, then distrust him!"

"God grant that this be not another pit for further fruitless bloodshed!" was the interjection standing in Georgiana's eyes, and then she dropped them pensively, while Merthyr recounted

the patient schemes that had led to this hour, the unuttered anxieties and the bursting hopes.

Still Emilia kept her distressfully unenthusiastic looks turned from one to the other, though her Italy was the theme. She did not eat, but had dropped one hand flat on her plate, looking almost idiotic. She heard of Italy as of a distant place, known to her in ancient years. Merthyr's transformation, too, helped some form of illusion in her brain that she was cut off from any kindred feeling with other people.

As soon as he had finished, Merthyr jumped up; and coming round to Emilia, touched her shoulder affectionately, saying: "Now! There won't be much packing to do. We shall be in London to-night in time for your mother to pass the evening with you."

Emilia rose straightway, and her eyes fell vacantly on Georgiana for help, as far as they could express anything.

Georgiana gave no response, save a look well nigh as vacant in the interchange.

"But you haven't eaten at all!" said Merthyr.

Emilia shook her head. "No."

"Eat, my Sandra! to please me! You will need all your strength if you would be a match for Georgey anywhere where there's action."

"Yes!" Emilia traversed his words with a sudden outcry. "Yes, I will go to London. I am ready to go to London now."

It was clear that a new light had fallen on her intelligence.

Merthyr was satisfied to see her sit down to the table, and he at once went out to issue directions for the first step in the new and momentous expedition.

Emilia put the bread to her mouth, and crumbled it on a dry lip: but it was evident to Georgiana, hostile witness as she was, that Emilia's mind was gradually warming to what Merthyr had said, and that a picture was passing before the girl. She perceived also a thing that no misery of her own had yet drawn from Emilia. It was a tear that fell heavily on the back of her hand. Soon the tears came in quick succession, while the girl tried to eat, and bit at salted morsels. It was a strange sight for Georgiana, this statuesque weeping, that got human bit by bit, till the bosom heaved long sobs: and yet no turn of the head for sympathy; nothing but passionless shedding of big tear-drops!

She went to the girl, and put her hand upon her; kissed her, and then said: "We have no time to lose. My brother never delays when he has come to a resolve."

Emilia tried to articulate: "I am ready."

"But you have not eaten!"

Emilia made a mechanical effort to eat.

"Remember," said Georgiana, "we have a long distance to go. You will want your strength. You would not be a burden to him? Eat, while I get your things ready." And Georgiana left her, secretly elated to feel that in this expedition it was she, and she alone, who was Merthyr's mate. What storm it was, and what conflict, agitated the girl and stupefied her, she cared

not to guess, now that she had the suitable designation, 'savage,' confirmed in all her acts, to apply to her.

When Tracy Runningbrook came down at his ordinary hour of noon to breakfast, he found a twisted note from Georgiana, telling him that important matters had summoned Merthyr to London, and that they were all to be seen at Lady Gosstre's town-house.

"I believe, by Jove! Powys manoeuvres to get her away from me," he shouted, and sat down to his breakfast and his book with a comforted mind. It was not Georgiana to whom he alluded; but the appearance of Captain Gambier, and the pronounced discomposure visible in the handsome face of the captain on his hearing of the departure, led Tracy to think that Georgiana's was properly deplored by another, though that other was said to be engaged. 'On revient toujours,' he hummed.

CHAPTER XLVIII

Three days passed as a running dream to Emilia. During that period she might have been hurried off to Italy without uttering a remonstrance. Merthyr's spirited talk of the country she called her own; of its heroic youth banded to rise, and sworn to liberate it or die; of good historic names borne by men, his comrades, in old campaigning adventures; and stories and incidents of those past days—all given with his changed face, and changed ringing voice, almost moved her to plunge forgetfully into this new tumultuous stream while the picture of the beloved land, lying shrouded beneath the perilous star it was about to follow grew in her mind.

"Shall I go with the Army?" she asked Georgiana.

"No, my child; you will simply go to school," was the cold reply.

"To school!" Emilia throbbed, "while they are fighting!"

"To the Academy. My brother's first thought is to further your progress in Art. When your artistic education is complete, you will choose your own course."

"He knows, he knows that I have no voice!" Emilia struck her lap with twisted fingers. "My voice is thick in my throat. If I am not to march with him, I can't go; I will not go. I want to see the fight. You have. Why should I keep away? Could I run up notes, even if I had any voice, while he is in the cannon-smoke?"

"While he is in the cannon-smoke!" Georgiana revolved the line thoughtfully. "You are aware that my brother looks forward to the recovery of your voice," she said.

"My voice is like a dead serpent in my throat," rejoined Emilia. "My voice! I have forgotten music. I lived for that, once, now I live for nothing, only to take my chance everywhere with my friend. I want to smell powder. My father says it is like salt, the taste of blood, and is like wine when you smell it. I have heard him shout for it. I will go to Italy, if I may go where my friend Merthyr goes; but nothing can keep me shut up now. My head's a wilderness when I'm in houses. I can scarcely bear to hear this London noise, without going out and walking till I drop."

Coming to a knot in her meditation, Georgiana concluded that Emilia's heart was warming to Merthyr. She was speedily doubtful again.

These two delicate Welsh natures, as exacting as they were delicate, were little pleased with Emilia's silence concerning her intercourse with Wilfrid. Merthyr, who had expressed in her defence what could be said for her, was unwittingly cherishing what could be thought in her disfavour. Neither of them hit on the true cause, which lay in Georgiana's coldness to her. One little pressure of her hand, carelessly given, made Merthyr better aware of the nature he was dealing with. He was telling her that a further delay might keep them in London for a week; and that he had sent for her mother to come to her.

"I must see my mother," she had said, excitedly. The extension

of the period named for quitting England made it more imminent in her imagination than when it was a matter of hours. "I must see her."

"I have sent for her," said Merthyr, and then pressed Emilia's hand. But she who, without having brooded on complaints of its absence, thirsted for demonstrative kindness, clung to the hand, drawing it, doubled, against her chin.

"That is not the reason," she said, raising her full eyes up at him over the unrelinquished hand. "I love the poor Madre; let her come; but I have no heart for her just now. I have seen Wilfrid."

She took a tighter hold of his fingers, as fearing he might shrink from her. Merthyr hated mysteries, so he said, "I supposed it must have been so—that night of our return from Penarvon?"

"Yes," she murmured, while she read his face for a shadow of a repulsion; "and, my friend, I cannot go to Italy now!"

Merthyr immediately drew a seat beside her. He perceived that there would be no access to her reason, even as he was on the point of addressing it.

"Then all my care and trouble are to be thrown away?" he said, taking the short road to her feelings.

She put the hand that was disengaged softly on his shoulder. "No; not thrown away. Let me be what Merthyr wishes me to be! That is my chief prayer."

"Why, then, will you not do what Merthyr wishes you to do?" Emilia's eyelids shut, while her face still fronted him.

"Oh! I will speak all out to you," she cried. "Merthyr,

my friend, he came to kiss me once, before I have only just understood it! He is going to Austria. He came to touch me for the last time before his hand is red with my blood. Stop him from going! I am ready to follow you:—I can hear of his marrying that woman:—Oh! I cannot live and think of him in that Austrian white coat. Poor thing!—my dear! my dear!" And she turned away her head.

It is not unnatural that Merthyr hearing these soft epithets, should disbelieve in the implied self-conquest of her preceding words. He had no clue to make him guess that these were simply old exclamations of hers brought to her lips by the sorrowful contrast in her mind.

"It will be better that you should see him," he said, with less of his natural sincerity; so soon are we corrupted by any suspicion that our egoism prompts.

"Here?" And she hung close to him, open-lipped, open-eyed, open-eared, as if (Georgiana would think it, thought Merthyr) her savage senses had laid the trap for this proposal, and now sprung up keen for their prey. "Here, Merthyr? Yes! let me see him. You will! Let me see him, for he cannot resist me. He tries. He thinks he does: but he cannot. I can stretch out my finger—I can put it on the day when, if he has galloped one way he will gallop another. Let him come."

She held up both her hands in petition, half dropping her eyelids, with a shadowy beauty.

In Merthyr's present view, the idea of Wilfrid being in

ranks opposed to him was so little provocative of intense dissatisfaction, that it was out of his power to believe that Emilia craved to see him simply to dissuade the man from the obnoxious step. "Ah, well! See him; see him, if you must," he said. "Arrange it with my sister."

He quitted the room, shrinking from the sound of her thanks, and still more from the consciousness of his torment.

The business that detained him was to get money for Marini. Georgiana placed her fortune at his disposal a second time. There was his own, which he deemed it no excess of chivalry to fling into the gulf. The two sat together, arranging what property should be sold, and how they would share the sacrifice in common. Georgiana pressed him to dispose of a little estate belonging to her, that money might immediately be raised. They talked as they sat over the fire toward the dusk of the winter evening.

"You would not have refused me once, Merthyr!"

"When you were a child, and I hardly better than a boy. Now it's different. Let mine go first, Georgey. You may have a husband, who will not look on these things as we do."

"How can I love a husband!" was all she said; and Merthyr took her in his arms. His gaiety had gone.

"We can't go dancing into a pit of this sort," he sighed, partly to baffle the scrutiny he apprehended in her silence. "The garrison at Milan is doubled, and I hear they are marching troops through Tyrol. Some alerte has been given, and probably some

traitors exist. One wouldn't like to be shot like a dog! You haven't forgotten poor Tarani? I heard yesterday of the girl who calls herself his widow."

"They were betrothed, and she is!" exclaimed Georgiana.

"Well, there's a case of a man who had two loves—a woman and his country; and both true to him!"

"And is he so singular, Merthyr?"

"No, my best! my sweetest! my heart's rest! no!"

They exchanged tender smiles.

"Tarani's bride—beloved! you can listen to such matters—she has undertaken her task. Who imposed it? I confess I faint at the thought of things so sad and shameful. But I dare not sit in judgement on a people suffering as they are. Outrage upon outrage they have endured, and that deadens—or rather makes their heroism unscrupulous. Tarani's bride is one of the few fair girls of Italy. We have a lock of her hair. She wore it close the morning her lover was shot, and wore the thin white skull-cap you remember, until it was whispered to her that her beauty must serve."

"I have the lock now in my desk," said Georgiana, beginning to tremble.

"Do you wish to look at it?"

"Yes; fetch it, my darling."

He sat eyeing the firelight till she returned, and then taking the long golden lock in his handy he squeezed it, full of bitter memories and sorrowfulness.

"Giulietta?" breathed his sister.

"I would put my life on the truth of that woman's love. Well!"

"Yes?"

"She abandons herself to the commandant of the citadel."

A low outcry burst from Georgiana. She fell at Merthyr's knees sobbing violently. He let her sob. In the end she struggled to speak.

"Oh! can it be permitted? Oh! can we not save her? Oh, poor soul! my sister! Is she blind to her lover in heaven?"

Georgiana's face was dyed with shame.

"We must put these things by," said Merthyr. "Go to Emilia presently, and tell her—settle with her as you think fitting, how she shall see this Wilfrid Pole. I have promised her she shall have her wish."

Coloured by the emotion she was burning from, these words smote Georgiana with a mournful compassion for Merthyr.

He had risen, and by that she knew that nothing could be said to alter his will.

A sentimental pair likewise, if you please; but these were sentimentalists who served an active deity; and not that arbitrary protection of a subtle selfishness which rules the fairer portion of our fat England.

CHAPTER XLIX

"My brother tells me it is your wish to see Mr. Wilfrid Pole."

Emilia's "Yes" came faintly in answer to Georgiana's cold accents.

"Have you considered what you are doing in expressing such a desire?"

Another "Yes" was heard from under an uplifted head:—a culprit affirmative, whereat the just take fire.

"Be honest, Emilia. Seek counsel and guidance to-night, as you have done before with me, and profited, I think. If I write to bid him come, what will it mean?"

"Nothing more," breathed Emilia.

"To him—for in his way he seems to care for you fitfully—it will mean— stop! hear me. The words you speak will have no part of the meaning, even if you restrain your tongue. To him it will imply that his power over you is unaltered. I suppose that the task of making you perceive the effect it really will have on you is hopeless."

"I have seen him, and I know," said Emilia, in a corresponding tone.

"You saw him that night of our return from Penarvon? Judge of him by that. He would not spare you. To gratify I know not what wildness in his nature, he did not hesitate to open your old wound. And to what purpose? A freak of passion!"

"He could not help it. I told him he would come, and he came."

"This, possibly, you call love; do you not?"

Emilia was about to utter a plain affirmative, but it was checked. The novelty of the idea of its not being love arrested her imagination.

"If he comes to you here," resumed Georgiana—

"He must come!" cried Emilia.

"My brother has sanctioned it, so his coming or not will rest with him. If he comes, let me know the good that you think will result from an interview? Ah! you have not weighed that question. Do so;—or you give no heed to it? In any ease, try to look into your own breast. You were not born to live unworthily. You can be, or will be, if you follow your better star, self-denying and noble. Do you not love your country? Judge of this love by that. Your love, if you have this power over him, is merely a madness to him; and his—what has it done for you? If he comes, and this begins again, there will be a similar if not the same destiny for you."

Emilia panted in her reply. "No; it will not begin again." She threw out both arms, shaking her head. "It cannot, I know. What am I now? It is what I was that he loves. He will not know what I am till he sees me. And I know that I have done things that he cannot forgive. You have forgiven it, and Merthyr, because he is my friend; but I am sure Wilfrid will not. He might pardon the poor 'me,' but not his Emilia! I shall have to tell him what I did; so" (and she came closer to Georgiana) "there is some pain for

me in seeing him."

Georgiana was not proof against this simplicity of speech, backed by a little dying dimple, which seemed a continuation of the plain sadness of Emilia's tone.

She said, "My poor child!" almost fondly, and then Emilia looked in her face, murmuring, "You sometimes doubt me."

"Not your truth, but the accuracy of your perceptions and your knowledge of your real designs. You are certainly deceiving yourself at this instant. In the first place, the relation of that madness—no, poor child, not wickedness—but if you tell it to him, it is a wilful and unnecessary self-abasement. If he is to be your husband, unburden your heart at once. Otherwise, why? why? You are but working up a scene, provoking needless excesses: you are storing misery in retrospect, or wretchedness to be endured. Had you the habit of prayer! By degrees it will give you the thirst for purity, and that makes you a fountain of prayer, in whom these blind deceits cannot hide."

Georgiana paused emphatically; as when, by our unrolling out of our ideas, we have more thoroughly convinced ourselves.

"You pray to heaven," said Emilia, and then faltered, and blushed. "I must be loved!" she cried. "Will you not put your arms round me?"

Georgiana drew her to her bosom, bidding her continue. Emilia lay whispering under her chin. "You pray, and you wish to be seen as you are, do you not? You do. Well, if you knew what love is, you would see it is the same. You wish him to see and

know you: you wish to be sure that he loves nothing but exactly you; it must be yourself. You are jealous of his loving an idea of you that is not you. You think, 'He will wake up and find his mistake;' or you think, 'That kiss was not intended for me; not for me as I am.' Those are tortures!"

Her discipline had transformed her, when she could utter such sentiments as these!

Feeling her shudder, and not knowing how imagination forestalls experience in passionate blood, Georgiana said, "You speak like one who has undergone them. But now at least you have thrown off the mask. You love him still, this man! And with as little strength of will! Do you not see impiety in the comparison you have made?"

"Oh! what I see is, that I wish I could say to him, 'Look on me, for I need not be ashamed—I am like Miss Ford!'"

The young lady's cheeks took fire, and the clear path of speech becoming confused in her head she said, "Miss Ford?"

"Georgiana," said Emilia, and feeling that her friend's cold manner had melted; "Georgey! my beloved! my darling in Italy, where will we go! I envy no woman but you who have seen my dear ones fight. You and I, and Merthyr! Nothing but Austrian shot shall part us."

"And so we make up a pretty dream!" interjected Georgiana. "The Austrian shot, I think, will be fired by one who is now in the Austrian service, or who will soon be."

"Wilfrid?" Emilia called out. "No; that is what I am going to

stop. Why did I not tell you so at first? But I never know what I say or do when I am with you, and everything seems chance. I want to see him to prevent him from doing that. I can."

"Why should you?" asked Georgiana; and one to whom the faces of the two had been displayed at that moment would have pronounced them a hostile couple.

"Why should I prevent him?" Emilia doled out the question slowly, and gave herself no further thought of replying to it.

Apparently Georgiana understood the significance of this odd silence: she was perhaps touched by it. She said, "You feel that you have a power over him. You wish to exercise it. Never mind wherefore. If you do—if you try, and succeed—if, by the aid of this love presupposed to exist, you win him to what you require of him—do you honestly think the love is then immediately to be dropped?"

Emilia meditated. She caught up her voice hastily. "I think so. Yes.

I hope so. I mean it to be."

"With a noble lover, Emilia. Not with a selfish one. In showing him the belief you have in your power over him, you betray that he has power over you. And it is to no object. His family, his position, his prospects—all tell you that he cannot marry you if he would. And he is, besides, engaged—"

"Let her suffer!" Emilia's eyes flashed.

"Ah!" and Georgiana thought, "Have I come upon your nature at last?"

However it might be, Emilia was determined to show it.

"She took my lover from me, and I say, let her suffer! I would not hurt her myself—I would not lay my finger on her: but she has eyes like blue stones, and such a mouth!—I think the Austrian executioner has one like it. If she suffers, and goes all dark as I did, she will show a better face. Let her keep my lover. He is not mine, but he was; and she took him from me. That woman cannot feed on him as I did. I know she has no hunger for love. He will look at those blue bits of ice, and think of me. I told him so. Did I not tell him that in Devon? I saw her eyelids move as fast as I spoke. I think I look on Winter when I see her lips. Poor, wretched Wilfrid!"

Emilia half-sobbed this exclamation out. "I don't wish to hurt either of them," she added, with a smile of such abrupt opposition to her words that Georgiana was in perplexity. A lady who has assumed the office of lecturer, will, in such a frame of mind, lecture on, if merely to vindicate to herself her own preconceptions. Georgiana laid her finger severely upon Wilfrid's manifest faults; and, in fine, she spoke a great deal of the common sense that the situation demanded. Nevertheless, Emilia held to her scheme. But, in the meantime, Georgiana had seen more clearly into the girl's heart; and she had been won, also, by a natural gracefulness that she now perceived in her, and which led her to think, "Is Merthyr again to show me that he never errs in his judgement?" An unaccountable movement of tenderness to Emilia made her drop a few kisses on her forehead.

Emilia shut her eyes, waiting for more. Then she looked up, and said, "Have you felt this love for me very long?" at which the puny flame, scarce visible, sprang up, and warmed to a great heat.

"My own Emilia! Sandra! listen to me: promise me not to seek this interview."

"Will you always love me as much?" Emilia bargained.

"Yes, yes; I never vary. It is my love for you that begs you."

Emilia fell into a chair and propped her head behind both hands, tapping the floor briskly with her feet. Georgiana watched the conflict going on. To decide it promptly, she said: "And not only shall I love you thrice as well, but my brother Merthyr, whom you call your friend—he will—he cannot love you better; but he will feel you to be worthy the best love he can give. There is a heart, you simple girl! He loves you, and has never shown any of the pain your conduct has given him. When I say he loves you, I tell you his one weakness—the only one I have discovered. And judge whether, he has shown want of self-control while you were dying for another. Did he attempt to thwart you? No; to strengthen you; and never once to turn your attention to himself. That is love. Now, think of what anguish you have made him pass through: and think whether you have ever witnessed an alteration of kindness in his face toward you. Even now, when he had the hope that you were cured of your foolish fruitless affection for a man who merely played with you, and cannot give up the habit, even now he hides what he feels—"

So far Emilia let her speak without interruption; but gradually

awakening to the meaning of the words:—

"For me?" she cried.

"Yes; for you."

"The same sort of love as Wilfrid feels?"

"By no means the same sort; but the love of man for woman."

"And he saw me when I was that wretched heap? And he knows everything! and loves me. He has never kissed me."

"Does that miserable test—?" Georgiana was asking.

"Pardon, pardon," said Emilia penitently; "I know that is almost nothing, now. I am not a child. I spoke from a sudden feeling. For if he loves me, how—! Oh, Merthyr! what a little creature I seem. I cannot understand it. I lose a brother. And he was such a certainty to me. What did he love—what did he love, that night he found me on the pier? I looked like a creature picked off a mud-bank. I felt like a worm, and miserably abandoned, I was a shameful sight. Oh! how can I look on Merthyr's face again?"

In these interjections Georgiana did not observe the proper humility and abject gratitude of a young person who had heard that she was selected by a prince of the earth. A sort of 'Eastern handmaid' prostration, with joined hands, and, above all things, a closed mouth, the lady desired. She half regretted the revelation she had made; and to be sure at once that she had reaped some practical good, she said: "I need scarce ask you whether you have come to a right decision upon that other question."

"To see Wilfrid?" said Emilia. She appeared to pause

musingly, and then turned to Georgiana, showing happy features; "Yes: I shall see him. I must see him. Let him know he is to come immediately."

"That is your decision."

"Yes."

"After what I have told you?"

"Oh, yes; yes! Write the letter."

Georgiana chid at an internal wrath that struggled to win her lips. "Promise me simply that what I have told you of my brother, you will consider yourself bound to keep secret. You will not speak of it to others, nor to him."

Emilia gave the promise, but with the thought; "To him?—will not he speak of it?"

"So, then, I am to write this letter?" said Georgiana.

"Do, do; at once!" Emilia put on her sweetest look to plead for it.

"Decidedly the wisest of men are fools in this matter," Georgiana's reflection swam upon her anger.

"And dearest! my Georgey!" Emilia insisted on being blunt to the outward indications to which she was commonly so sensitive and reflective; "my Georgey! let me be alone this evening in my bedroom. The little Madre comes, and—and I haven't the habit of being respectful to her. And, I must be alone! Do not send up for me, whoever wishes it."

Georgiana could not stop her tongue: "Not if Mr. Wilfrid Pole —?"

"Oh, he! I will see him," said Emilia; and Georgiana went from her straightway.