



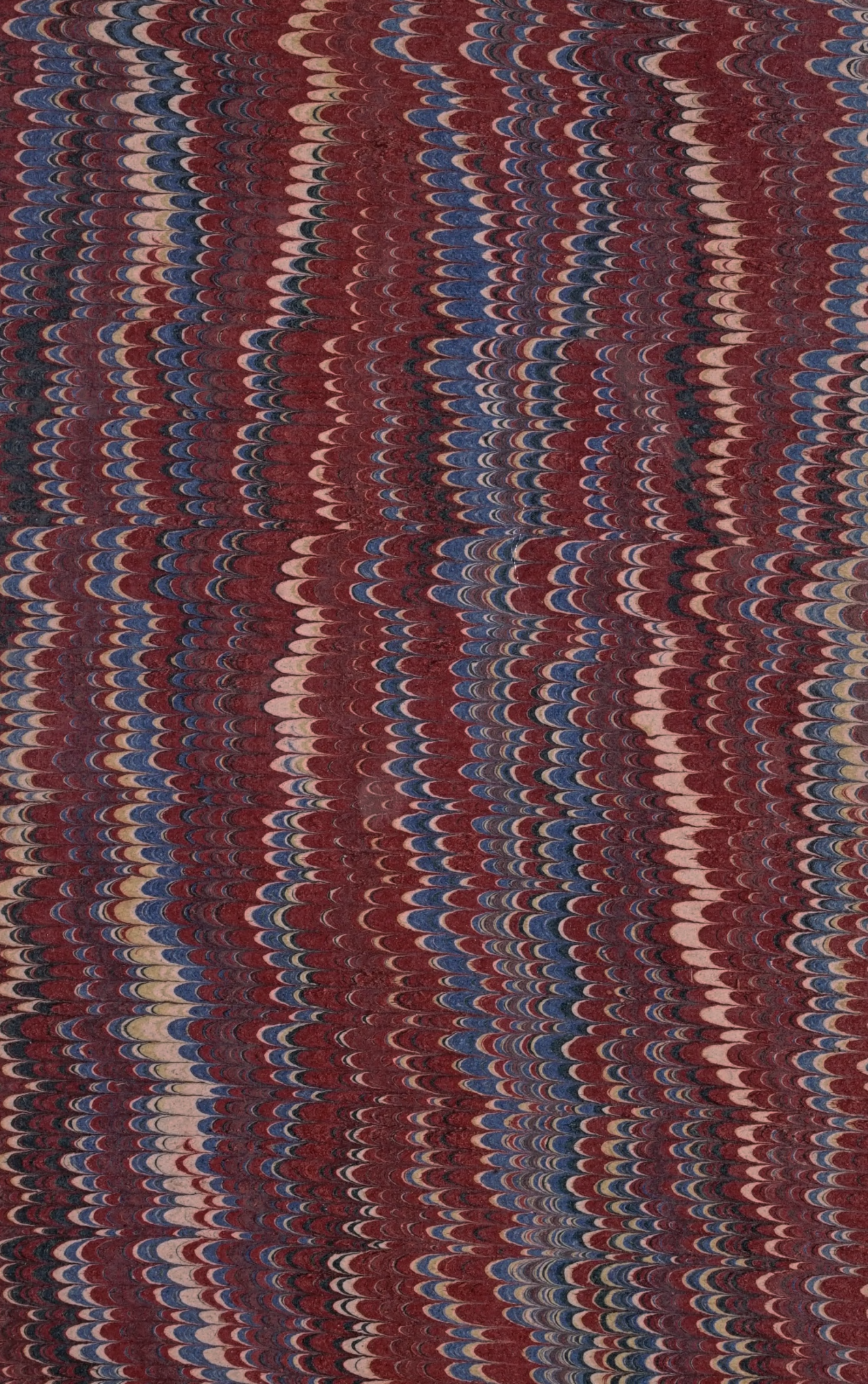
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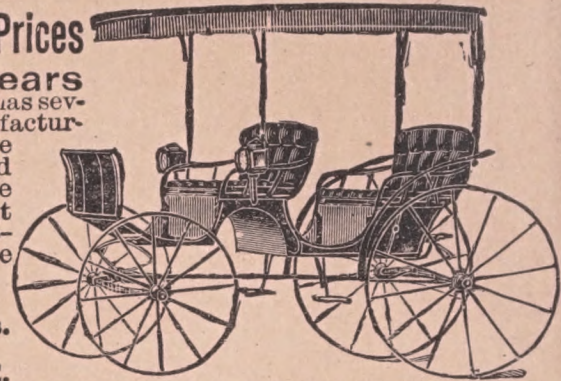
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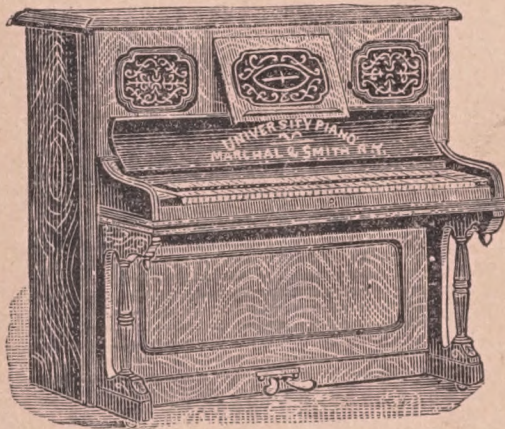
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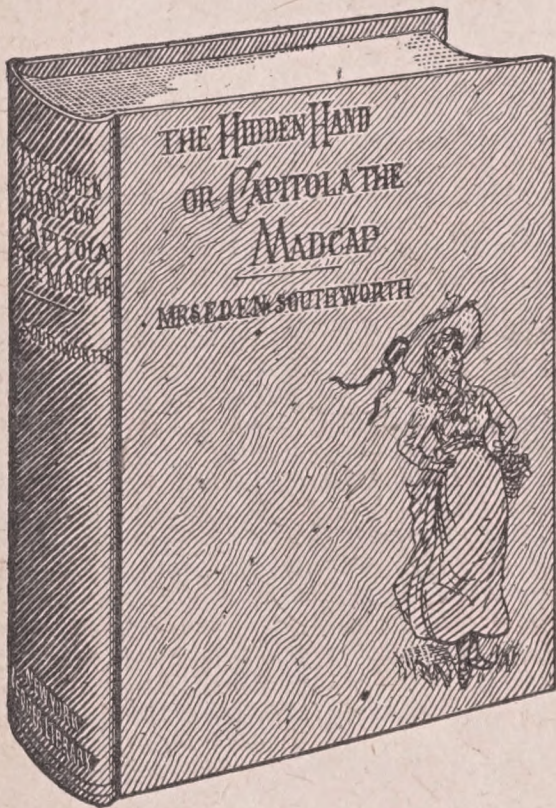
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THE
BARONESS BLANK.

A NOVEL OF THE NEW GERMAN
EMPIRE.

By AUGUST ^{ie. Wilhelm Otto August} NIEMANN.



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THE BARONESS BLANK.

CHAPTER I.

XANTIPPE.

Doctor Steelyard was sitting in his study laughing aloud. He passed his hand over his bald pate with a gesture of comfort, as if he meant to wipe all the folly of the world from the home of his thoughts, caressed his long gray beard, blinked with his small eyes, in which there shone a perfect flood of humor at the passing clouds on high, and laughed heartily and steadily.

The door opened and a lady entered, who looked in surprise at the laughing man. She was as beautiful as the great scholar was ugly, and his ash-colored coat and his whole costume was as old-fashioned, neglected and worn, as her toilet was modern, carefully selected, and brilliant in its newness.

After having looked at him awhile steadily, without in the least attracting his attention; her expression changed from wonder to that of patient indulgence with the well-known oddities of a being differently made from herself, she went up to him, kissed him on his magnificent dome-like brow, and said :

“Well, my little old man, what are you laughing at quite alone here?”

Doctor Steelyard had, in the meantime, resumed his serious air, and nodded kindly, but made no answer.

The lady drew one of the very plain cane chairs with which the simple room was furnished, close to the equally plain, uncushioned chair of the great scholar, placed her white, well-kept hand on his shoulder, and repeated her question in a caressing tone.

“Ah,” he said, “I was thinking of something.”

“Thinking of something? Will you not tell me what that was?”

He answered with a low growl, which evidently meant that he wished to be left alone.

“Tell me,” she repeated once more, “what it was, so that I can laugh with you. I cannot understand how a sensible man can laugh by himself.”

The scholar grunted once more.

“I am not opposed to merriment,” she said, turning very red, “and I also understand witty sayings, although you seem to doubt that. I even think I laugh more than you do. But how one can laugh, being alone, that is more than I can comprehend.”

“There, you see, we laugh at different things!”

“You mean,” she replied quickly, “you at immensely deep things—I at frivolous matter.”

“Well, well!”

“Oh! If you will not tell me, then I know. You laughed at me!”

“Pshaw!”

“I know this laugh of yours. It is insulting. But at least I demand to be told what it is.”

“My dear child,” said the learned man, rising and seizing his hat, “the weather is exceptionally fine to-day,

and I think I'll take a little walk, to enjoy spring and the new green."

The blush on the passionate lady's cheeks gave suddenly way to an appalling pallor. She tried to suppress her excitement, and said, after a pause, in a quiet voice :

"Please, don't go away, Ephraim—I cannot bear that!" And as he turned round in the door she added : "I do not wish to be the wife who is so quarrelsome that she drives her husband from his own house."

He passed his huge bony hand softly over her luxuriant golden-brown hair, and said : "As a reward, dear Clara, and to reassure you, I will answer your question. Do you see this little book?"

"And did that make you laugh so?"

"This little book was written by my enemy on 'Kant's Critique of Pure Reason,' and made me laugh because it showed so very clearly how closely our athletic men are packed into the human skin. He has explained all the great philosophers, Descartes, Bacon, even Plato himself. I think he wants to put them all into uniform ; coat, trousers and waistcoat he makes for them out of his metaphysics ; then he rolls them out flat upon a board and offers them nicely to the great public. That is what makes me laugh."

"If I could only see what you mean! You always speak in riddles and as if every school-boy knew his Plato as well as his catechism. You laugh at all the great men of the world, but I am yet to see that *Magnum Opus*, as you call it, that is to make you rich and famous."

"You see, dear Clara," said the old man, holding his penetrating eye firmly fixed upon her face, "the sophists were the people in ancient Greece who had become rich and famous by their science. In the button-hole of their chiton they wore the Spartan Order of the Lion, the Fox Order of Athens, the Bull Order of Thebes

and the Golden Lamb of Arcadia. They were the Professors and Councillors, the Members of the Privy Council and Councillors of State, of Government, of Finances, of Foreign Affairs. Truth was nothing to them. But Socrates was a different man. His friend, Alcibiades, compared him to those earthenware figures of followers of Bacchus, made of rude clay by ignorant men and fit only for children's toys. But some of these figures of clay were hollow, and when you broke them open you found inside a saintly priest or the image of a god. My friend Rabelais, also, whom you will not read, says that Socrates was outside so ugly that no woman would have given an onion peel for the whole man as he stood. He was so ill-made, so ridiculous in his manners, so simple in his actions, so boorish with women, and above all, so poor in money and property, no woman would look at him, no government intrust him with the lowest office. And yet this man, if you only knew how to open the outside shell, showed within a superhuman intellect, marvelous virtues, invincible courage, perfect content and sublime contempt of all that men run and hunt and strive for till the grave swallows them up. And you will not understand why I laugh!"

The lady did not like the portraiture, and took no pains to dissemble. She did not understand the allusion to Socrates, and Rabelais she could not endure. She deeply regretted her husband's plebeian taste.

"All that is intended for me, I know," she said, "but I should like to see this truth of which you talk so much. If it were good for anything, it would have done something for you. Are all the great men of the world sophists, as you call them, who fill high places and enjoy large salaries?"

"My beloved Clara," replied the bald-headed husband, stroking his beard, "perhaps you do not know yourself

how well you speak and how very grateful I ought to be to you for taking the trouble of calling me day by day back to my duty ; of performing, here in my humble study, all the solemn duties of the great public, and of representing alone, in your small, well-formed, seductive form, all that the Evil One showed the Saviour from the high mountain."

The fair lady was so angry that her whole body began to tremble. But so overpowering was the prestige of her husband, that she once more overcame the passion raging within her, and after a pause, said, in an humble and caressing tone :

"You are so immensely clever that I can of course not dispute with you. But it distresses me to see a man like you, who is so much wiser and better than all the others whom I know, not appreciated as he ought to be. For you surely could do much more for your fellow-men if you were in a high position. An unknown scholar may teach the greatest and deepest truths—nobody hears him. But a man in a high place, even a popular writer, wields a great power. Men are weak ; they worship appearances !"

"Eve, my Eve !" he replied, smiling, "has a married life of twenty-six years not taught you yet that I do not eat your apples ?"

"Do not say bitter things. I have always been a faithful helpmate to you, and my small, worldly wisdom, as you call it, has helped you and your children a little, I hope."

"How could I deny that ?" he said kindly, passing his hand again tenderly over her hair.

"You took me when I was as poor as a church mouse, and you never thought in your generous mood how this might hamper you. I am almost afraid you would not have married me at all, if I had not seemed to be a per-

son worthy of deepest compassion. You seemed actually to be disappointed when a few years later a distant relative left me a small fortune and we were thus enabled to live a little more comfortably. You retained the old simplicity, as if we were still as poor as ever. You ought at least to be glad that we can secure to our children a safe and comfortable future !”

“Whether the life of a man was better or worse—that we see when he dies.”

“You must at all events be glad,” she continued, angrily, “that our Alfonse has entered a distinguished career, but you cannot expect your sons to be as wise as you are. You always blame Alfonse, but I am glad that he is full of life and energy. A good officer and an honorable man—what more do you want of him ?”

The great man slowly shook his head.

“Alfonse is like a swaying reed,” he said, “and exposed to many temptations.”

“Alfonse has a kind heart.”

“A good heart ! Yes, I like also a good mind.”

“Alfonse has a very good head.”

“That is your opinion. But I find that he lacks character. I look to his principles.”

“Alfonse has excellent principles.”

“Granted—but every wind blows them away.”

“Then it is our fault. We have bred him ! And yet I think we have neglected nothing.”

“My dear Clara, parents would fare badly if they were responsible for their children in the way you represent it. Character is inborn to man. No education can produce, nor change that in man. A good-for-nothing remains through life good for nothing, and a useful man is useful unto death.”

“Alfonse is a useful man,” his mother said with shining eyes. “He has the best a man can have ; he has

ambition, and I can proudly say that he has it from his mother."

The husband looked at her with a melancholy smile.

"Oh, how I wish," she continued, "that I could give you some, too! You have everything to make a brilliant career. All who know you are charmed with your treasures of knowledge and they remain enthusiastic admirers in spite of your discouraging manners. How many great authors have urged you to write something,—a novel,—and promised you triumphant success! And again in the service of the State! Even although you will not accept office, if you would only consent they would make you a position such as would please you!"

"And how do you know that?"

"You can rely upon it! You have only to say so, and they have promised to make you Professor of National Economy. My brother Baldwin has told me so a dozen times."

The old man laughed. "Do you not know the Chinese proverb :

'Riches and honors are like a merry dream in the fifth
watch of the night,
Promotion of merit like a fleeting cloud,
Take not a golden chain for the neck,
Nor a lock of jewels to fetter your feet!'"

"Oh, never mind your wise Chinese writers! Be sensible. Baldwin is the man to help us. He has much influence and wishes you well. I have often been distressed when you treat him with such scorn, such repelling, icy coldness, while he has ever been most kind to you. I admire his good-nature, for he always speaks of you with esteem."

"Have I ever desired his good wishes?"

“No, to be sure, nor have I, although—”

“Oh, speak it out. I know it is he who patronizes your pet, Alfonse. He, and perhaps another man, who has great power in high places. I never thought that your kinsmen would rise so high and shine so brilliantly. Why, they are members of the Imperial Diet, Presidents of great Boards of Revisions, money-princes and rulers at ‘Change!’”

“You ought not to complain. I think you might remember how difficult it was to make Alfonse an officer. Nor ought you to take it amiss if I say that your Jewish blood was not exactly profitable to him. You cannot think what chances this kinship with great men opens to our children.”

“What chances do you mean?”

“Have I not begged you again and again to make common cause with Baldwin, so as to realize our hopes? I think it is high time to make sure of him if we are not to lose everything. Uncle Liondell will be seventy in a few months, and he has the gout. If he dies and we are left out in the cold, it is your fault.”

“My dear Clara, those claims which you fancy we have on Uncle Liondell’s inheritance, are too vague to be considered.”

“By no means! You can swear to it in every court. Your father lent him ten thousand dollars and he promised to return the sum with compound interest. Now, I am sure Uncle Liondell has increased those ten thousand to at least a hundred thousand. This sum he must leave us, or he shall find no rest in his grave!”

“You do not know what you are saying,” growled the husband. “We do not know but old Liondell may have repaid your father long ago! I tell you once for all, I do not want to hear another word of that idle story. I do not want any of that man’s money. It is the sweat of



“WELL, MY LITTLE OLD MAN, WHAT ARE YOU LAUGHING AT?”—See Page 10.

millions of poor creatures which he has changed into millions of gold, and Baldwin with his speculations on change and his philanthropic phrases—I cannot digest. I cannot and will not join him in anything.”

“How can you be so proud?” Clara cried with scornful laughter; “why do you sneer at men who have obtained what you will never reach in your life? When your sister Rachel engaged herself to Baldwin he was on the lowest rung of the social ladder, and now—as you say—he is a member of the Imperial Diet and president of a Board of Revision, with orders and distinctions of all kinds, while you are still what you were then.”

“What a pessimist you are, Clara!”

“How can I help it, when I see you wasting your magnificent talents, your shrewd judgment, your precious time—all upon this ridiculous search after truth. Look at the Comets! Your sister moves in the highest circles of the capital; she has one of the most brilliant salons in the city; she and her children have only to wish and it is theirs, while you sit like an owl in the darkest corner of the world. I do not despise them; I confess I should also like to be great, and rich, and distinguished.”

“But now it is high time to take my walk,” calmly said the old scholar. “Time flies, see how low the sun has sunk.”

“Are you going to make me mad, Ephraim? This is your way; first you excite me till I am boiling over, and then you leave me, and let me work it all out *alone*. Why don't you answer me? Why don't you contradict me, if I am wrong? You can beat me—you can tread on me—only don't go away—it makes me furious.”

But the old man had already put his broad-brimmed straw hat on his bald skull, and when she rushed to the window, she saw the broad-shouldered, massive form, walk down the street with sounding steps.

She seized a glass of water that stood near at hand, and poured the contents on his head.

“Answer me!” she screamed down.

The old man shook himself, waved the wet hat, and murmuring, “My Clara is not in good humor to-day,” he slowly walked on. Several street boys, who had watched the scene with intense delight, shouted a cry of triumph, and the passers-by looked on wondering. “Socrates and Xantippe!” said laughingly a student to his friend. He had a gentle, sweet-hearted lady-love of his own, and felt high above poor married men.

CHAPTER II.

THE SENORITA MOLINI.

Lieutenant Alfonse Steelyard, whose talents and temper appeared so different to father and mother, spent the same evening at the Alliance Club, where on that day the introduction of Miss (or perhaps Mrs.) Chessa de Molini, was to take place. He had desperately fallen in love with this Spanish lady, and made great pecuniary sacrifices in order to gain admittance, for her sake, to this aristocratic and expensive club. Only people of the best society were admitted, and it was the ambition of his life, encouraged by his mother, to gain an entrance into these privileged circles. So far, however, he had only succeeded in knowing people who spent more money than he could ever hope to have, and in being given up by comrades who lived on a less extravagant scale. He felt at times as if he had fallen between two stools.

His mother helped him as much as she could, behind her husband's back, but money was scarce in the house, and yet he was already head over ears in debt and dared not tell her so. To approach his father with his troubles, never entered his mind; he knew too well how the old gentleman despised all money matters and considered them unfit for sensible men.

Alfonse was, moreover, dissatisfied with his profession. He had behaved well during the war and stood well in the ranks of the army; but after all, he was only a Second Lieutenant and had an almost endless list of services before he could aspire to become a First Lieutenant, and what was to be the end of it? Always to drill, to run on two legs through dust and mud, with no brilliant prospect for the future and a miserable pittance for the present. That was not what he desired! He felt that he had talents, but he knew that in the ranks of the subalterns it was utterly indifferent whether he possessed talents or not. He knew that most of his comrades were inferior to him in education, but they advanced just as fast as he; it was on the cards that he should be admitted into the War Academy, but that alone did not yet secure him the desired promotion to the staff. He thought with horror of the many sons of rich and great families who were his rivals.

He did all he could do. He was conscientiously attentive to his duties, and neglected no opportunity to let his light shine, especially before his superiors. He visited at the houses of several renowned professors, and was well acquainted with some of the great artists of the day, so that he could always form his judgment on new books or new works of art. He went much into fashionable society, affected even a certain fondness of sport, which however, did not fit him well, and made himself, thus, a little model of perfection. But in his heart of hearts

he felt that all this was of no use. His cousin, Amadeus, Baron Liondell, was a very different man, after all, and when he looked at him and thought how he eat and drank, where he lived, what high-bred horses he kept, and that he was going to marry a fair and rich countess, he felt savage. He repented not having become a banker like him, and remembered his mother's story that the foundation of the enormous Liondell fortune rested upon a sum which his grandfather had loaned old Liondell, and which had never been repaid.

As a matter of course, he never betrayed these views of his ; on the contrary he professed a certain contempt for all money-making pursuits, and loved to assume the part of a Cid Campeador or a Roland who cares for his horse only, and for his sword, and to be the slave of the lady of his love.

A silent hope that all might yet turn out well, when old Liondell should repay the half of a million which he owed to the two families of Steelyard and Comet, always gave him new courage, when he met his mother.

The public singer, Molini, to whom he for the time swore allegiance was as a star engaged at the opera and the whole city was full of her praise. The Military Attaché at the American Legation had sworn that he, who had seen and heard all that was most admirable in two hemispheres, had never seen the like of this lady. The whole golden youth, of course, repeated the judgment—who would have dared to show that he was not as good a judge as this young lieutenant of a diminutive army? It was the old story, that a bold-faced *danseuse* or a mighty athlete, a chess-playing automaton or a perhaps pseudo Chinese are more attended and more admired than the best and most faithful preacher of the Gospel.

The senorita was to be formally introduced that night at the Alliance Club by a Baroness Blank. This arrange-

ment caused much shrugging of shoulders, as that good lady had herself only a somewhat dubious standing in the club. It was, no doubt, a very good name she bore, but people whispered strange things about the family into each other's ears.

Baron and Baroness Blank belonged to the purely ornamental appendages of good society. No one knew how they lived. But they did live, and they moved in the most elegant circles. They were an unsolved riddle, and if there were people who knew them, they were either too good natured or too much interested to betray their secret.

The Blanks did introduce the Spanish lady to the managing committee of the great club, and these again introduced such members as desired the privilege. The scene was brilliant and exceedingly picturesque. The artist was small and fully dark of skin, but the blood showed through the delicate skin, with blue-black hair and eyes. She wore a dress of yellow silk with deep red roses, and covered her shoulders—lightly—with some black lace declared to be of truly fabulous value. The married lady was tall and slender, towering by a whole head above the foreigner. She had the pale complexion that resembles ivory, only less white, more like a faded tea rose. Her eyes also were dark, but no one claimed to know the precise hue or color. Her expression was a strange blending of weariness and subdued passion, and her eyes had a somewhat uncanny glamour about them, which was almost painfully attractive. Her hair looked black, but when not seen *en masse*, but in braids or curls, it had a charming sheen of bronze. She was dressed altogether in black and only wore a few brilliant stones in her towering hair.

Baron Blank walked behind the two ladies. He was a man of impenetrable countenance, bald head and

enormous blonde beard. The appearance of the artist in whose honor the assembly had been arranged, produced a certain sensation, and with Alfonse, who at once advanced to welcome her, a number of persons came and formed a circle around the new-comer. Others held a little aloof and exchanged opinions. Among these were two prominent members, Prince Lignac, and Baron Amadeus Liondell.

The prince belonged to an old French family who had owned an independent sovereignty in a petty state of Germany, and showed in his whole appearance his descent from men who had been accustomed, in times of old, hand on sword, to spend their lives on horseback and in unceasing strife. He was tall, of great elegance, with a small, well-formed head and a high-born air. Unfortunately his blue eyes had an uncertain, melancholy expression, while the lips, covered with a small, very light moustache, betrayed a tendency to scorn, and there was wanting in the whole the stamp of thorough manliness.

Baron Liondell, much younger than the prince, and hardly twenty-five years old, was small, and showed in his vivid, almost mercurial gestures, an overflowing fullness of life in strange contrast with the passive manner of his companion. His black eyes sparkled like stars in the handsome face with the yellow complexion and the oriental features.

“Did you see, prince,” asked the latter, “how she turned her head? She is looking this way; she is looking at us!”

“I wonder what this Baroness Blank may cost?” said the prince in reply. “Do you know it, my dear baron? You know the price of everything here, while I have become almost a stranger.”

“I think,” said Liondell; “you would learn that most

easily from her husband!" and he laughed as if he had said something very witty.

"You are too bad, by Heaven!" exclaimed the prince. "You are worse than I thought you were, and an abominable wicked sinner, who in the course of time will ruin the whole virtuous city. But what do you say, will you buy that mare of mine?"

The baron was slightly embarrassed and showed it.

"I must first try her once more; she is disposed to run away."

"Pshaw!" said the prince, "a baby can ride her with a thread of silk, and you shall have her for four hundred coins. But to come back to our mutton,—I rather like this Blank, and her husband's head is shaped in the way I like best. He has a forehead that is evidently predestined to bear horns—a conformation which I have quite frequently noticed in this good city."

"You think you are still in Paris, prince," replied the baron, who was going to be married in the course of the summer, "but we are here in Berlin, where another standard of morality is adopted."

"Yes, yes!" said the prince, indisposed to pursue the subject. "But, see! is not that your cousin, dear baron, that handsome, black-eyed lieutenant there, with the senorita? It seems to me I have him at one of your father's Lucullan dinners!"

"Cousin *a la mode de Bretagne*," replied the baron contemptuously. "Lieutenant Steelyard, not noble!"

The prince looked at him ironically, and then said in an affected, high tone, with half-closed eyes and in the slow, sharply-accented manner which he adopted in speaking when he was bent upon annoying some one, "I read the other day in the German Peerage the history of your baronial family. I think the article was incomplete."

“ How so ? ”

“ In the historical part the book only states that Simon Dahl, your honored father, was created a baron of the Empire, but it says nothing of the long and glorious family history which preceded this creation. Your ancestors were known centuries ago. The Dahls or Thals, if I am not mistaken, were of the tribe of Levi, and what is the story of a family like mine, that is only about six hundred years old, by the side of one which goes back to the days when the Red Sea went out of the way of its members? If I were in your place, I would send the editor a communication to that effect. Think of Lord Beaconsfield—how proud that great statesman ever was of his old and distinguished descent ! Yes, I must confess, if I had ancestors who had stood guard before the Ark, I should say, as my sainted cousin used to say, ‘ *Roi ne puis, baron ne daigne, Dahl ge suis.* ’ ”

The young baron did not like his friend’s speech in the least, and looked with burning cheeks at the toes of his boots. He knew there was no revenge against the prince. He had a way of saying the most extraordinary things, which no one could imitate, and he always had the laughter on his side. A reply would have made matters only worse, and what use would it have been to quarrel with him, the most distinguished man in the club, who was, moreover, the best marksman on the pigeon-platform at Monte Carlo ?

The baron was still hesitating what he should do, when fortunately a towering officer of cuirassiers approached them, whose familiar and cordial greeting gave the baron the desired opportunity to escape and to seek safety with the admired artist.

The cuirassier matched the prince in height and breadth of shoulders, a superb picture of a steel-clad warrior. He was very dark-complexioned, with jet black

hair, a bold eagle's nose, and a tremendous moustache standing out stiff and straight.

After the two men had exchanged cordial greetings and joyful inquiries after common friends, the officer asked : "But what brings you here at this time, my dear prince?"

The prince hesitated a moment, sunk in deep thought and then said : "My dear cousins, I will tell you that most candidly ; I mean to get married."

"Married!" repeated the new-comer raising his eyebrows "and with whom?"

"Ah! you see that is more than I know. My plan is as yet quite general. I think it is time for me to do it, and I mean to do it, provided I can find a suitable match. She must, of course, be rich, beautiful and amiable. What do you say? Do you advise me to do it?"

"Well," was the answer, "if you are determined to do it, the lady would be easily found."

"In fact, I should not like to do it, unless you advise me to do it. You have always been an excellent counsellor and I value your advice most highly."

"Very well, then," said Victor, "you shall have my advice with pleasure."

"But if you think I had better remain a bachelor and preserve my liberty as heretofore, I might do that. But how am I to continue my lineage and my possessions?" asked the prince. "Every man has a wish to have sons and daughters who give him joy, and to whom he can bequeath his possessions. Is the race of the Lignacs to die out with me? Is my coat-of-arms to disappear from among men, my proud old name to be heard no more? the thought makes my heart stop beating."

"That is true," replied the other ; "then marry!"

"Your advice, dear Victor," said the prince, "reminds me of songs which we call *scies* in France. The lines go

up and down like a saw, and are intended to annoy and vex people. I find nothing but irony in your counsels, for you alternate regularly. Marry ! Marry not !”

“The reason is,” replied the cousin calmly, “that you mention, one after the other, things which contain a good deal of truth, but which contradict each other. It seems to me you do not know yourself what you wish. But that is after all the main thing ; the rest Fate decides. But tell me, dear cousin, who is that young infantry lieutenant there ? His feet have, to my eyes, a cut that is not purely germanic—his legs savor of the chosen people. Could you imagine that his ancestors ever mounted a horse ?”

Alfonse Steelyard whom the two men were observing, was a handsome, nice-looking young man of very good manner and a military carriage, so that the sharp eye of an arch-aristocrat alone could detect the taint in his blood. Even then it was less the shape of his limbs than the gliding, sliding nature of his motions which marked him. He was deep in conversation with the senora, enjoying the advantage of speaking French very fluently and thus obtaining the precedence over many rivals.

She did not know a word of German and spoke only French and Spanish. It was, therefore, no pleasure to him that just then the signal was given to go to supper, when Prince Lignac came up to carry off the fair lady, according to previous arrangement, while he himself had to be content with a very modest place. From here he could only send burning glances to the artist whom he admired so much. He disliked especially to see her seated between the prince and his cousin, Baron Liondell, who as treasurer of the club had claimed this seat of honor.

Alfonse did not like the prince, who was too grand for him, and seemed to be especially haughty towards him ;

besides, he was jealous of him, knowing very well what daring and what unscrupulous cunning he could develop in his intercourse with the fair sex. With Baron Liondell he maintained a cool politeness ; for although they were cousins the immense wealth of the Liondells, and the desire to mingle only with the highest in the land, had erected a barrier between the two families. Alfonse and his mother resented this bitterly, because both branches aimed at the same end, which the Liondells had reached, while they saw no way of achieving as much.

While Alfonse watched the fair foreigner from afar, he tried to console himself by conversing with his neighbor, an interpreter of the Turkish legation, who gave interesting accounts of the Court of the Padishah. Prince Lignac in the meantime made good use of his opportunity with the Spanish singer. He was perfectly at home with ladies of the theatre, knew what interested them so that he never was at a loss in conversing, although he saw his new acquaintance to-night for the first time. Among the defects of the prince, moreover, bashfulness had never been mentioned, and as he knew himself to be fashionable and entertaining, he made little ceremony in trying to win the lady's favor.

But although the prince knew the little people of the stage, and no longer fancied that theatrical prime donne were ethereal beings, whose food was Art, nightingales in the shape of women, with no other aim in life than to please men by the sweet sounds of their throats, he was still surprised by the cold, calculating mind of the Molini. He looked with astonishment at this bright-colored girl, full of life and spirit, and endowed with an angelic voice, who, in her bosom, hid the soul of a commercial agent. Whatever subject of conversation he could touch, *this* enchanting daughter of the south would return to money. The various peculiarities of the music of Italy

or France, the objections to Wagner's operas, the lavish generosity of English audiences—all led back to the one question, how does it pay?

The prince took a strange pleasure in this novel conversation with a lady. His sarcastic vein was pleasantly tickled by meeting with such startling contrasts in human nature, and he knew with exquisite cunning how to make his new friend feel so perfectly safe in his hands that she spoke out with perfect candor and showed herself such as she was. The one advantage he himself had, was the conviction that it would never do to fall in love with this siren. That, he told himself, would be as fearful as the fate of Midas, when, in the hands of the ever-hungry old man, everything turned to gold.

While he was thinking of this lesson, and the whole assembly was animated most pleasantly, an incident occurred which produced a startling sensation.

The artist availed herself of the moment when the excitement seemed to be at its highest, when her flashing eyes and the silvery notes of her voice, accompanied by loud though melodious laughter, had attracted the attention of the company to her person, to commit an act of strange coquettishness. With a quick, but graceful gesture she suddenly drew the black lace fichu from her shoulders and appeared in her low-cut evening dress. This was all the more striking as no other lady in the house was *décolletée*, but it displayed with marvellous effect the surpassing beauty of the Spaniard. Around her neck, superbly balanced on her body, she wore a gold necklace consisting of quaintly-cut red corals, with huge gold balls between the branches. This act attracted universal attention. The gentlemen declared, with one voice, her beauty to be unequalled in Europe, and the ladies looked at each other with the silent conviction that this strange, theatrical conduct, surpassed in insolence all

that native artists had ever ventured to do. All eyes however, were directed at the beautiful neck and its remarkable ornament.

“An extraordinary piece of jewelry,” said the prince, looking curiously at the chain; “if I am not mistaken, of oriental workmanship! I see some amulets there belonging to the Islam, a hand against the Evil Eye.”

He was interrupted by a loud outcry of the artist, and noticed, looking up, how she stared with horror at a gentleman who, as if he had risen out of the ground, stood suddenly before her, and pointed, with a furious gesture, at the same ornament.

It was the interpreter of the Turkish legation. His eyes were wide open, glaring and full of fierce fire; his whole person showed every muscle strained to the utmost, his face turned nearly white, his hands as in spasms, firmly closed, and his whole appearance that of a tiger at the moment when he is about to leap on its victim. Voltaire says that men of the south have, instead of blood, liquid metal flowing in their veins, and in this man, born near the Equator, this seemed really to be the case, and all awaited the explosion with horror.

At first a torrent of unknown, unintelligible words poured forth from his pale lips; then, as he saw that he was not understood by any one, he began to speak Spanish, and this the artist evidently understood, to judge from her gestures. Anxiously seizing the necklace, she shook her head, and drew the lace so as to hide her shoulders and the ornament. But the enraged man clutched at her neck and seized the chain. It looked as if he were about to strangle the fair singer. She cried aloud, and it was only by the combined efforts of the prince and Lieutenant Steelyard, who had quickly run up, that the stranger could be forced to let her go.

When he saw himself thus held by the two gentlemen,

and noticed the general indignation with which his conduct was regarded, he again poured forth long explanations and curses, but this time in French, so that all could hear what he was saying. He maintained that the necklace was his, an old heirloom in the princely family of which he was a member, and taken from him in the most disgraceful manner. At the same time he tore open his shirt bosom, and amid fearful curses he showed there the two letters B. L. which were burnt into his skin. At this sight the artist uttered so fearful a cry that a physician was instantly summoned. After she had been removed into an adjoining room, there was universal confusion and consternation. No one could explain what had really happened, but all had their guesses and their suggestions to make. One presumed that a long time ago the Arab and the Spaniard had loved one another, till she had abandoned him, taking the talisman with her, which had now led to recognition. Others maintained that the artist was an escaped slave from the seraglio of the Grand Vizier, who by her flight had compromised the Arab and led to his being branded in punishment. A third coolly suggested that the interpreter had suddenly become insane. The prince alone wondered if the strange, gold-thirsty song-bird might not simply have stolen the chain.

In the meantime no one knew what to do with the interpreter, who seemed still to be beside himself, and could only be kept by force from following the Spanish lady. Efforts were made to quiet him, but he was in such a state of excitement that nothing had any effect. He exclaimed repeatedly that only blood could satisfy his just wrath, and the club-men at last sent for the police and had him put in a place of safety. As a member of a foreign legation he was first sent to the palace of the Russian minister, in whose presence and with whose con-

sent he was to be examined. Baron Liondell, upon whom the sight of the letters B. L. seemed to have made a deep impression, followed the police.

CHAPTER III.

THE MEMBER OF THE DIET.

“Why, what a surprise!” said Doctor Steelyard, rising from his work. “Our honored brother Baldwin!”

He led his visitor to the sofa and continued :

“Well! Does the wheel of the State stand still that you are at leisure to seek me out in my solitude and at this hour?”

“Is it really such a very extraordinary event, my dear brother, to visit here?” the other asked in return. “I fancy we see you more rarely at our house than I appear here.”

“And yet I would wager that there must be some very special reason for this visit to-day. The parties are fighting hard in the Diet. What becomes of your followers, when one of the most eloquent leaders is absent?”

Doctor Comet looked rather absent-minded, and did not reply at once. He had the appearance of a man who is so occupied with weighty matters of business, that even among friends the process of thawing is a slow one, and with poor relations very marked, for he wishes them to know and to feel that he is placed so high in the world that it requires a certain time and labor to come down to a level with their insignificance.

He was a man of imposing presence, and carried himself exceedingly well. Dignity was enthroned on his brow, and benevolence and affability played around his mouth. He was dressed with elegance, but soberly,—all in all he was a man who, as everybody felt, was called to be a leader of men.

“Indeed,” he said with a little sigh, “I have not much time of my own, and but rarely am able to enjoy, as others do, the pleasures of private life. Our political relations are very complicated and require to be treated with great delicacy and circumspection. Whenever an important step is to be taken, the members of our party at once turn to me, for they have reached the conviction that they have in me the best judge and the ablest negotiator, although I know very well myself that they have far too high an opinion of my little ability. Then I have the supervision over that large and philanthropic establishment, the Patriotic Bank of Commerce, and others like it, which takes much time and hard work. I can but rarely indulge in pleasures which to men of more modest positions, appear almost necessities of life.”

“Yes, my dear Baldwin,” said the learned brother, “it is no trifle to be a great politician, a diplomat and a statesman all in one. You have not only the talent to acquire a large fortune, while you further the welfare of the country by your financial operations, but you have also that eminent ability in matters of State which he requires who wants not to be under-valued but to make himself a great name. I admire that, indeed. But of course, the work is hard.”

The deputy cast a look of mistrust at his brother-in-law. The latter, however, remained very quiet, and continued: “How is it that those great heroes which we are at school already taught to admire as law-givers and

eminent statesman, not alone the ancients as Aristides, Lycurgus, Solon, and so on, but also the more recent patriots, as Franklin and Washington, or our own countryman Stein—how is it that these men had no talent to make fortunes, but on the contrary suffered the greatest calamities? How is it that they disregarded all these drawbacks, and even gave of their own to serve the common weal?”

“Past times, my good brother-in-law,” said the statesman, “are not to be compared with our times. That simplicity of life survives now only in memory, and our culture is as superior to those primitive forms of which you speak, as our ideas are different from those entertained at Athens or Rome.”

“You surprise me, still, I see at least that our day is superior to those ancient times in this point, that now it is possible for the great statesman at the same time to make the State great and himself rich. I see that in you and your friends. You promulgate the wisest laws and the best, and in an abundance formerly entirely unknown. And yet you find means to provide abundantly for your old age !”

“Yes, you are right. It is a pleasant consciousness to feel that I can, by means of the considerable fortune which I have acquired by hard work, provide for my children and children’s children, and at the same time prove useful to relatives and friends.”

“You see now that I was not so very far from right when I compared you to Solon and Aristides—Solon was after all one of the Seven Wise Men, and Aristides bore the name of the Just !”

“I wish, my dear brother, you would let us forget your Greek friends, and come down for a moment to a more practical standpoint. The matter is this. For some time I have been very violently attacked in the public papers

and elsewhere. You know I gave up my former position in the service of the State in order to devote myself wholly to the well-being of the State. As my means were very small, and life in Berlin is very dear, I was compelled to eke out my little income. Under these circumstances they offered me the place of President of the Board of Supervision over the Patriotic Bank of Commerce, and I accepted it in order to be able to live here and to give myself up entirely to politics. This was an act of personal sacrifice, and yet now I am attacked, and people say, unabashed, that I use my political influence to secure advantages to the Bank which I control!"

"Is it possible?" cried the bald-headed man.

"Oh, they did more than that! Soon afterwards, you know, the universal confidence which I enjoy made me head of the Great Consolidation State Funds, and I have ever since done my best to invest these moneys in the best and safest manner, and yet at the highest possible rates of interest. Now, however, in consequence of certain disastrous events that could not be foreseen, several investments have turned out badly, causing a loss of several millions to this Fund. Now, mischief would have it that this loss fell almost altogether upon such values as were connected with the Patriotic Bank of Commerce. The shameless press thereupon comes forward, and my adversaries attack me as if I had propped up my private bank with the money of the State and enriched myself in so doing!"

"That is a cruel charge," said Steelyard.

"Is it not? A grievous, an infamous charge! I need not tell you, of course, that I am innocent. I have laid by a certain sum of money, but by no means as much as they state. I was assured, when I took hold of the bank, an income of about ten thousand dollars. This income, thanks to a few lucky speculations, it is true, turned out

to be about ten times as much, thanks to my skillful management. I could lay a little aside. The workman is worthy his hire. But to say what my enemies say is a wretched tissue of abominable lies."

"Then you will, of course, easily refute your adversaries."

"That is the question. You know that of a bold calumny something always remains. But to convince you—"

"Pardon me, honored brother-in-law, but would you oblige me by telling me first what can possibly induce you, the Member of the Diet and great statesman that you are, to entrust these secrets to me, the old owl that sees and knows nothing of what is going on?"

"In the first place you know how highly I value your personal opinion," said the statesman, courteously; "but permit me to complete my appeal to you. The enmity against me, you must know, contemplates not only my fate but the destruction of all that exists—"

"I can understand that if they dare attack *you*, they can aim at nothing less."

"They propose a perfect revolution, the annihilation of the system by which Germany has become great, and to which alone it is due that her citizens lead in the culture of the world, not as the French boastfully claim, but in sober morality and under the banner of true liberty."

"Awful!"

"Dear Ephraim, it is—in one word be it said—the reaction which once more raises its Hydra-head and now hides behind an abominable mask. They reproach our party in the open Diet, that we dance around the golden calf!"

"Dance around the golden calf," repeated Doctor Steelyard, thoughtfully. "That is a most interesting phenomenon, and I am half inclined to think that your

party ought to consider it an honor rather than a reproach. It seems to me that the erection of the young bull, as also the frequent restoration of the worship of Baal, was only a reminiscence of the Egyptian sun-worship, which speaks highly to Aaron's praise. Solomon adorned the gable of the temple at Jerusalem with an image of the heavenly bull, Jeroboam set up the same image at Dan and at Bethel as guardians of the kingdom, and made the Ten Tribes worship it. I might—"

"I pray you, Ephraim, let us settle this first! Paradoxes we have enough. Does not somebody say King Solomon must have loved the daughters of Moab, because he could never have indited his wonderful song if he had only had sorry Jewesses before his eyes. Not very complimentary for my wife, who is, after all, your sister. I do not understand how you, an Israelite by birth, can take this so calmly. No, this is a matter that concerns us both, for my enemies make use of my connection with the great house of Liondell to call out into the wide world that I and my party have abused our privileges of making laws, for the benefit of our race and of 'Change!"

"I do not see how that can touch me, Baldwin. I am so insignificant that nobody has yet thought of attacking me, and the man who should speak of my fortune as made by speculation on 'Change, would certainly be laughed to scorn."

"I should not have thought you such an egotist, Ephraim; but at least listen to my request. You are thoroughly at home in all that concerns the finances of the State, and you write in the most convincing manner. What I want to ask you is this: would you undertake in a pamphlet to state and explain the methods according to which I and my friends have managed the funds of the State, so as to show that it has always been

done in the most conscientious, and at the same time, most profitable manner?"

"But you surely have many pens that would do this much better than I can."

"You can do it better than any one else, believe me."

"That is certainly not so, dear brother-in-law. For you see I am an old-fashioned man who can write only what is my sincere conviction. But many of the literati who belong to you are trained to write as it suits your purpose, and that seems to me necessary in this case."

The old scholar looked down.

"Come, Ephraim, I will give you ten thousand dollars if you will write me a good, powerful, crushing reply to the attacks of my enemies."

"Ten thousand dollars! That is a good deal of money," said the old man, shaking his bald head. "If I only knew what to do with the money! I cannot invest it in fine wines, because I do not drink wine. With cigars it is the same. If I were to begin eating game-pie and caviare, I should ruin my stomach in my old days. To keep a mistress? No, for Clara's sake I should not like to do that, now, you see. What in all the world could I do with ten thousand dollars?"

"Oh," said the statesman impatiently, "leave them to your children."

"That is true. If I only thought they would bring my children a blessing! Could I leave them unjust money, do you think?"

"Unjust money!" cried the other. "What words you use! If you were not a man of mature years, I should remind you of Schiller's verse: 'Quickly youth is ready with words, which cut like the blades of a knife!'"

For a whole hour the two clever men fought a duel with words, never hoping to convince, but actually enjoy-

ing the clashing of words as duellists love to hear the clanking of swords. At last the great statesman's patience was utterly exhausted by Ephraim's persistent though ever courteous refusal to comply with his wishes. During the conversation a pale young man had come in, and respecting the eagerness of the two disputants, had quietly sat down and listened.

Now when Baldwin strode out in all the majesty of loftiest indignation, Doctor Steelyard said laughingly to the pale youth :

"There he goes ; Uncle Comet, after having emptied his whole quiver full of arrows, fleeing like the Parthians."

"He need not have fled," said the young man, fixing his dark, melancholy eyes on his father. "He would have been as well content with the appearance of victory as with victory itself. I only fear you will no longer receive invitations to his wife's receptions."

"And great will be my grief and inconsolable my wife."

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD SERPENT.

Doctor Comet rapidly went down the stairs after leaving Steelyard, and his face assumed an air of dissatisfaction and almost sadness, which little harmonized with the cheerful look and the affable dignity calculated for publicity. His cab was waiting for him at the door. He hesitated for a moment before he told the driver his new destination, and then entered, absorbed in thought.

"I do not know," he said to himself, "why I dislike that man so much. This pedantic old fool with his

Greeks and Romans ! I sometimes feel as if he tried to be ironical with me, this bookworm who does not know any more of the world than a new-born baby, or whose whole wisdom does not produce enough to enable him to provide for his family. And I verily believe he thinks he is a happy man. Such conceit ! I should not wonder if he goes to bed every night early, sleeps well, rises well, and then breakfasts well !—and I ! I never sleep as I should like to sleep ; I never fail to lie awake. The burden of such an enormous responsibility weighs me down !

“Perhaps my antipathy against the doctor is a reflex of my relations to my unsympathetic wife. But I knew all that before I married her, and I never thought that love was necessary in marriage. To be sure, if I dream that I might have married Lily Blank !—A charming woman !—I never saw human being with head so divinely set on the neck, and the neck on the shoulders ! The Venus of Milo alone in the whole world has that neck. But even her complexion is enchanting. This faintly yellow shade, mixed with a little gray, is more pleasing to my eyes than the freshest, rosiest face on earth. When I look at that morbidezza which I admire as I would worship an angel from Heaven, I must think of the many nights she has spent in wild orgies and of the storms which have raged in the heart of this passionate being. And her eyes ! they are unfathomable ! I believe the woman bears some resemblance to myself. There is always some secret behind. I believe her capable of anything, this daughter of Moab, and in myself also I feel a demon that might drive me, circumstances being favorable, to the sublimest act of Divine mercy, or the most fearful of crimes ever committed by a Judas Iscariot !

“What would have been the outcome, I wonder, if I

had married her instead of this mollusk Rachel? When I imagine her, with her royal carriage and her lofty head worthy of wearing a crown, striding grandly across my paths, I feel an irresistible impulse, a burning desire to call her mine. But who can trust her? She always reminds me of the Sphinx in the Sahara. What an inscrutable face on the winged body of a lioness! But what paws, what mighty crushing paws she has!

“Lily was not ten when I married Rachel. How could I at that time foretell that I should ever meet a Lily? I married the daughter of Abraham because I thought it would be to my advantage, and I have profited by my connection with the Liondells. Now, however, the Jews are a yoke on my neck. Even in the Diet one or the other looks at me sideways when Jews are mentioned, and this relationship alone, I believe, stands between me and the minister’s portfolio. Pshaw! Who knows? The end is not yet! After all, I may have done very well. Rachel is indolent, she studies her books, doles out the potatoes to the servants, amuses herself with her dressmaker, and lets me have my own way. I believe she is not even aware of the share Lily has of my life. But if Lily were my wife—I might as well live in a dynamite factory!

“Even now, although she is not my wife, I often dread her. Her passion is unbounded, and since I committed that grievous blunder and let her know that the child is still alive, she is a changed person. We never learn to know women however old we may be! I should have expected, it seems to me everything on earth rather than this longing for her child. What sentimentality! I cannot in the least understand it!—now—after eighteen years! My wise brother-in-law would show me on her occiput how the organ of maternal love makes a big bump there! She insists upon taking the girl into her house as her

niece. But I do not trust these Blanks; their circumstances are too fearfully disordered. Herr Blank is not worth a pinch of powder, and if I were to surrender the child into their hands, they might make a lemon press of it, in which I should be the lemon."

Doctor Comet threw himself angrily into another corner of his cab. "If I could get rid of her in a fair way, I should feel strongly tempted to do it. It is, after all, great folly to carry on a love affair. It causes annoyance enough to make one feel twice married. I can remember those fearful times, when she and I had broken and I had not seen her for years—how, merely to annoy me, she married this shoe-black, this man Blank. Every day, every hour, I longed for her. To be sure, that was a long time ago, and I have grown much older and calmer,—older certainly; but it seems to me as if age had brought no peace, as if the years had only made me weaker when facing my passions.

"If I only knew myself! But I could swear by the Evil One, I do not know whether I love this desperate siren! Buridan's ass could not feel more embarrassed than I am. Well, here we are!"

Comet paid the driver, and slipped into the next house door. He mounted two flights of stairs, rang a bell, a maid appeared, and he was shown in.

In the elegantly furnished room, into which he entered unannounced, the lady of his thoughts was lying on a couch and seemed to read. Her face was turned away from the door, and possibly she was really so deeply interested in her book, which was lying before her on the back of an Angora cat, that she did not become aware of the presence of a stranger. By her side was a dainty little stand of bronze with a tea-service of exquisite porcelain, from which the fragrance of the very strong tea arose, which

Comet knew was the lady's favorite beverage. A peculiar, novel light produced by skillful arrangement of portières, curtains and shades, and by the colored veils hung over several electric lights, and in addition to all, the delicate odor of a newly invented essence, lent the room a peculiar charm which captured the senses. Doctor Comet paused a moment on the threshold, and a slight trace of apprehension appeared in his features, as he tried to read the face of the fair siren.

Her appearance could not be more peaceful. Gracefully leaning back, her proud head slightly bent forward, her right hand was resting on the head of the cat, which, blinking and winking, squinted at the new-comer, and the large ruby on the little finger shone with uncanny fire from out of the snow-white fur of the creature. With her left she held the book. Her feet were crossed, as with the sleeping genius in Greek sarcophagi, her black dress hung down to the carpet in picturesque folds. But this image of peace did not satisfy the visitor. He could not get rid of the thought that the beautiful woman resembled too strikingly the cunning, subtle animal, which might with lightning speed shoot forth those sharp claws in which it delighte.

He approached her with a smile on his face, and began in a caressing voice, "Little children's little kitten loves to be stroked—" when Lily suddenly raised her eyes from the book, and as she opened wide her long-fringed eyelids, a flash of lightning sprang forth which made him stop instantly.

"My sweetest Lily, I am unhappy beyond expression, that I could not come sooner to bring you my most cordial congratulations on this, your birth-day, but business of the most important and the most urgent nature—"

He seized the hand with the magnificent ruby to kiss it as usual, but she quickly snatched it away from him,

so that he could only feel how icy cold it was. The kitten opened its huge mouth wide to yawn, and showed all of its white little teeth.

“No apologies, I beseech you!” said the lady. The tone of her voice was deep and pure. It had those gentle vibrations which, to some hearts, are irresistibly attractive.

“You are right,” said Comet, taking a seat and trying to look unconcerned. “Between us external formalities are useless formalities. You know, of course, as well as myself, that nothing but the most absolute necessity could have kept me away from here on such a day. But see, my dearest heart, how do you like this sample of my artist’s taste?” With these words he handed her a velvet-lined case, containing a magnificent necklace of large golden balls.

“I had told him,” he continued, “it must be perfectly simple, as it was intended for a bust in which the exquisite purity of the outlines forbade all artificial ornamentation.”

He handed her the case, as he thought he noticed a disposition to stretch out her hand so as to receive it, but her slender, pointed fingers never took hold of the jewel; the superb chain fell on her satin dress and rolled down to the floor with a slight clinking noise. The cat pounced upon it in a moment, and at once began to play with the costly toy.

He bit his lips and watched the play with bitterness intense. “You are an entertaining visitor,” said Lily, after a lengthy pause.

“It seems to me I have said more than you,” he replied.

“Ah, my friend, if it is a trouble to you to speak to me, you had better not have asked your wife’s permission to come here.”

“Pshaw,” he exclaimed angrily. “Do you want to make a scene?”

“And you,” she said laughing, and half rising, “you neglect weighty affairs of State to witness scenes. What keeps you here? the door is open. I know you are tired of me. You only wait for an opportunity to get rid of me. Go, my friend, go and never return!”

“Really?” he asked rising. “Well, if that is what you want—farewell!”

Pale with anger he took his hat, bowed, and resolutely went to the door. She followed his movements with watchful eyes, and, as he seized the handle, she was behind him with one leap, seizing him by the shoulders and flashing lightning at him from her glorious eyes.

“You will go, Baldwin?” she said with a hissing voice.

“You have made me go,” he answered angrily, and freed himself from her grasp.

“Don’t go!”

“I am no fool!” He opened the door. She followed him. Without minding the astonishment in the servants’ hall, as he opened the door leading to the staircase, she went after him, step by step, down the long stairs, like his shadow.

At the foot of the stairs he paused.

“Are you entirely mad?” he asked fiercely, in a whisper. “How can you commit yourself, in this way? We know not whom we may meet.”

“I do not care!” was the answer.

He shrugged his shoulders and went on. At the house-door, before leaving the portico, he paused once more, considering that it might be embarrassing for him, also, to be seen in the street in company with a lady of wondrous beauty, but without bonnet or gloves.

“What is it you want?” he asked.

“The address of my daughter!”

“I do not know what you mean by calling her so pathetically, *my* daughter! She is as much my daughter as yours, and I hope I shall do my duty to her better than you do.”

“Give me the address!” she repeated.

“No, I’ll give you nothing!”

“Well—then I stay here. Wherever you go, to the theatres, to a ball, to the session of the Diet, to Rachel, I shall cling to you like a burr, and should it be my last day.”

He clinched his teeth. He feared her passion was strong enough to make her really do what she threatened, and thus compromise him or make him ridiculous. He determined to yield.

“Surely you are as mad as you are fair—or more so. When I was quietly sitting by your side, and you might have gotten from me all things at leisure, you drove me out of your house. And now, when I obey orders and leave you, you come running after me. Is that logic?”

“I never had any logic,” she promptly replied.

Astounded and almost disposed to laugh, he heard these words. It occurred to him what folly it was to quarrel with a woman, and to demand of Lily what she really was not able to give. He looked at her and noticed how beautiful she was in her wrath. Her eyes were black and brilliant, her skin paler than usual, and her hair, resembling bronze, seemed to change into tongues of fire.

He said very calmly.

“Dearest Lily, I see I was wrong. Pardon me what I have done amiss, and let us return to your rooms. You see,” he said as they were ascending the stairs once more, “as to that address, you shall have it. I heartily approve your plan—to take the girl under the name of your niece into your house—only I have some hesitation

about the time and precise way of doing it. But we can discuss that !”

“Are you in earnest?” she asked; “you members of the Diet are such eels—so smooth and so slippery !”

“Oh, Lily !” he said reproachfully.

Thus they returned into the tempting apartments. The baroness dropped into a low, luxurious arm-chair, and let her tears flow. He sat down facing her and was silent.

“Let me tell you,” said Lily, in a most melancholy voice, “that I have for several days anticipated this meeting and suffered greatly. Why I did so, you know perfectly well.”

He made no reply, but looked at her.

“If you really loved me, you would know what I mean. But, to be sure, what do I expect? I had hoped so much from that evening when I was to introduce Chessa Molini at the Alliance club. I hoped surely you would be there. I never dreamt that you could disappoint me. For you only I had dressed myself as I rarely do, for you alone my hair was arranged—as you like it! And the evening would have been so grand if I had seen you there. Everybody was full of animation, the Chica created an immense sensation, and I made a charming new acquaintance, a Prince Lignac, who had himself presented to me, and who turned out a charming young man, and seemed to take a special interest in the Chessa, sat by her at table, and had wonderful powers of conversation. I do not remember ever having met with a more interesting companion. But all that was pleasant was ruined, as far as I was concerned, by your absence. Oh, pray, hush! Do not tell me at length how the Committee's Sittings or the Bank Correspondence kept you at work all night! I know that! I know that the State was irrevocably ruined if you had not saved it that evening. Nevertheless it was very humiliating to me, that you did

not appear at the club that night ! I feel more than ever that our alliance is balancing on the sharp edge of a knife, and may at any moment come to an end. You will throw me away like an old, worn-out glove ! And this is to be the end of a passion which you once told me glowed in your heart with immortal fire !”

Doctor Comet observed Lily as she was thus speaking, with admiration of the ever-changing play of her features, and enchained by the wonderful low notes of her melodious voice, which held him in bonds like nothing else on earth. Once more she stood before him, a fair and dangerous riddle, which he must solve. His heart told him that he could not live without her, his mind warned him that he ought to give her up if he ever wished to be happy !

He bent down, picked up the golden chain, with which the pretty kitten no longer cared to play, and laid it on the little stand, at the same time asking for a cup of tea.

“I do not know which, the excellent qualities of your green Pecco, or the charming sight of your beautiful hands, when they are busy with the little kettle and the gold box, affect me so pleasantly. But these precious hours, when I have taken tea with you, are the sweetest in my whole life, this room my paradise in this restless, ever busy world ; I cannot give them up, even if you will embitter them by your most unjust accusations, you wicked fairy. By the way, you mentioned the other day a note which might embarrass your husband. I have brought the money. You will perhaps be so kind as to give it to him ?”

Lily rose, took the notes with a slight nod, and went with them to the escritoire at some distance. She seemed to know with what eager eyes the statesman would follow her steps, and how he loved to watch her



ALPHONSE AT ONCE ADVANCED TO WELCOME SEÑORITA MOLINI.—See Page 23.

gentle, undulating motions, for she busied herself a little more than was absolutely necessary in locking up the money, and then pretended to arrange the silver tea-equipage. Twice her dress touched him, and she took up the quaint necklace and put it around her neck. At last she came up to him, most humble in her looks and ways, and said with folded hands :

“Pardon me, I was childish ! You are a great man, and hence I find it hard always to meet you on your own ground. My love may kill me.”

CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER LOVE.

The pale young man who was so profoundly disgusted with the injustice practiced by mankind in the world, was Doctor Steelyard's second son, called Ephraim. This name had from time immemorial been in the family, and in spite of the mother's opposition, he also had been condemned to bear it since his birth. He had studied at Berlin, and the aim of his life was to become a professor of history. He was immensely industrious, and had no interest for anything aside from Science. Books were his sole companions ; the study-lamp his sun. He was barely twenty years old, but already his teachers looked upon him with marvel and with admiration, hoping that he would be a light in Science that might explain much. At the college already the acuteness of his intellect and the cutting criticism of his mind had made a sensation. Never was a word uttered in the lecture-room lost by him. He had always been at the

head of his classes, and his examinations were rather conversations between equals.

Gradually, however, the color faded out of his face, the spirit wore out the body, and the blade began to use up the scabbard. His soul was pure and chaste; no earth-born passion had ever yet invaded it, but now an indescribable longing began to spring up in him. There were days when he awoke early, as soon as the sun sent the first golden rays across the deep blue ether, and when a feeling roused him that to-day he must seek that happiness to which he was by nature entitled. Then he rapidly dressed, as under the impulse of a foreign power, and anxiously he hastened out into the street. Whither next? He knew it not. Eagerly scanning the morning sky, he stood there uncertain what to do, where to go, until he had a vague feeling that he was summoned in this direction or that, and he hurried off with beating heart and burning breast. His pale complexion, the glowing fire in his eyes, his strange ways, all attracted people's attention; workmen, street sweepers, beggars, stared at him and set him down as an unhappy youth who was flying home, half-drunk, after a badly spent night. So young and already so bad, said the market-women, who were fixing up their baskets in the morning, and shook their heads at the handsome, but dissolute young man.

He tried to read his books, but even his favorite writers no longer held him; he read a page or two and found that he did not know what he had read. He was terrified at himself, and no angel came from heaven to bring him on golden dishes the spiritual food after which he longed and yearned!

These days of bitter humiliation, however, alternated with other days full of haughty pride. On these days he was ready for his work, great tasks shrank down into

slight efforts ; when he wrote, his pen flew over the paper. Then he felt confident of success ; his courage was high and he looked upon the future as his property—he was sure he would be great and famous.

His suffering air induced his parents to send him out of Berlin. They tried to persuade him to give up his studies for a time and to live in the country, but he did not accept the advice. He did not think he could live without work, and disliked immensely to be considered delicate. He had been deeply wounded and lowered in his own eyes when he found himself rejected as a volunteer for the Army. His pride was hurt, and he felt so humiliated by this open avowal of physical weakness, that for a time he avoided meeting his old friends.

His parents tried to console him, recalling to his mind the fact that in all his life he had not once been sick enough to consult a physician, and that he was only less muscular perhaps than other young men grown up in the open air.

He resolved at last to leave Berlin and to go to Heidelberg for a year. “Many young men go to that beautiful city to study, and when they get there, think no more of studying, but allow the charms of nature to bewitch them. I should be delighted to hear that you will do like these idle students, enjoy the enchanting surroundings, and never open a book !” So spoke the wise father.

Ephraim said good-bye, travelled slowly from Cologne up the river, and reached Heidelberg in the period of Nature’s first and fairest awaking. Here he engaged simple rooms, in keeping with his modest means, entered his name for one series of lectures only, and tried to find pleasure in the beauty of Nature. But the sail up the Rhine had made him melancholy, and the lovely Neehan valley did not cheer him. He daily made

his way up to the Castle, the most beautiful ruin on God's earth, and gazed out upon the enchanting landscape, but he grew sadder every day. He discovered that it had been a mistake to come to Heidelberg, for the beauties of Nature only increased his longing, and never satisfied his wishes.

One splendid, warm evening, as he was sitting quite alone among the ruins of the Castle, and saw the sun set in marvelous splendor, he felt so lonely, so forsaken by God and man that at last the tears came pouring forth in hot torrents. He rose at once, feeling heartily ashamed of himself, and vowed he would never again allow himself to be thus overcome.

He went home, lit his lamp, and went deep into his Aristotle, till he gradually grew more quiet and composed. He had never attached himself to other students. His delicate nature shrank from contact with merry but coarse young men; their conversation, showing that they never reflected on what they were saying, and did not know what had been written on the subject, was painful to him, and as to beer-drinking and wine-bibbing, he hated it because it deprived him of that clearness of perception which he valued most highly.

Only with one single student he had become acquainted. This was a harmless, good-natured young man, with whom Ephraim felt at his ease. The greatest charm, however, which this friend had was that Adolf—this was his name—played the piano wonderfully well. Music was Ephraim's greatest enjoyment, and when he could lie on his friend's sofa, with a volume of new poems in his hand, and listen to his playing, all evil spirits were banished, and he felt himself lifted up to higher spheres.

Opposite Ephraim's rooms there stood an old, odd-looking house, which he enjoyed highly. It was evidently of hoary old age, for it was built as no one for many

hundred years had ever dreamt of building, and he had never seen the like of it anywhere. It had a mysterious air about its stone carvings and marvelously deep window embrasures, with quaintly painted wood-panels. Ephraim often fancied that behind those small windows, with their countless little panes, set in lead, true happiness must be hidden.

Each story of this quaint house overlapped the lower one considerably, so that the house was much larger above than below. But the most attractive feature of the whole building was a projection which protruded out upon the street. Below, it rested upon a single highly ornamented column, which stood in the middle of the sidewalk, so that people passed underneath, while the odd projection rose up as far as the roof. It contained three rooms in as many stories, each with three windows, one looking upon the street, and one on each side, from which one could look up and down the whole street. And such charming, poetical little windows they were, framed in with stone garlands of fruits and flowers, and scenes from the Old Testament between them, while in the second story a number of blooming flowers and cacti adorned them from within. Around the pillar, which was covered with rich carvings and ended at the top in the leaves of a palm tree, children were always playing, and when it rained people would be waiting here till the rain ceased ; they had an abundance of time in Heidelberg, very different from Berlin.

From this house now there sounded very often melodies which made Ephraim listen in rapture, and he discovered in the course of time that his uncouth blonde friend was the performer. The two young men went the same way to their lectures, and thus began their acquaintance. Adolf Ryman was silent, and Ephraim liked that. He thought the world good enough—what

was the use of losing words about it? All was good that was, and if anything was not good—could we alter it? He, on his side, liked to listen to Ephraim when he explained to him his notions of the government of the world, wondered at this waste of cleverness, and nodded his head as his only reply. His repose was not to be shaken. He was of mighty stature, a genuine old German, with large blue eyes, light golden hair, and a maiden's complexion. He had served his year in the Army as a volunteer, standing as the tallest on the right wing of the company. Ephraim liked his indolence; he could do what he chose, Ryman was always content. Toward evening Ephraim used to go across into the old house as soon as he heard the piano. Then he climbed two steep flights of stairs, across spacious landings, into the low room where the fair-haired student was at home, nodded to him, who never stopped, and lay down on the sofa. Mr. Ryman played and played, now Norma and now Lohengrin, now from printed music and then from his own fancy, and Ephraim dreamt and was happy. But at eight o'clock Mr. Ryman rose, took his many-colored student's cap and his long pipe, nodded and went away, never caring for what became of his visitor. The latter followed him after a while and returned to his own room. Ryman spent the evening at his club, and destroyed incredible quantities of beer. He was a splendid beer-drinker, calm, smiling and invincible.

One fine day, when Ephraim as usual, attracted by Mozart's melodies, came across to visit his friend, he saw a girl sitting on a table before his friend's door who struck him as peculiar. She sat there perfectly unconcerned, resting one foot and swinging the other, while her simple blue frock was so short that Ephraim could distinctly see a stocking that had slipped down. The girl had genuine golden hair—Nature's own precious

metal—and radiant blue eyes; at the moment when Ephraim became aware of her, she was biting, with two rows of splendid pearl-teeth, into a gigantic slice of brown bread and butter, and the teeth cut out a considerable circular space from the slice that was an inch thick. When she saw the strange gentleman, she laid the slice aside and blushed.

Ephraim went into his friend's room, sat down on the sofa, and thought what sort of a girl this damsel might be. Was it a servant? Her dress was very plain. But for a servant she looked too delicate after all, and there was a certain something about her which pointed out a higher social position. Her appearance had struck Ephraim, and he could not help thinking of her.

At last he asked his friend.

“A girl?” asked the latter in return.

“Yes, sitting there on a table before your door.”

“Perhaps sister!” replied Ryman, and went on playing.

“His sister!” Ephraim said to himself. “Where does she come from? and why does she sit there before the door? Does she live here?”

“Is she here on a visit?” he asked at last, as Ryman got up and put his tiny cap on.

Mr. Ryman looked at him amazed. “On a visit? No, she has been away on a visit and has come back now.”

Now only Ephraim began to suspect that his friend might live in the bosom of a family. He had never suspected that, because no family had ever been mentioned.

Mr. Ryman went and Ephraim followed, wondering inwardly at the character of this family. The girl was no longer sitting on the table, and he saw her no more.

“I should like to know the parents,” thought Ephraim, smiling. “These Rymans have evidently the pure, un-mixed blood of the old people of Tacitus in their veins.”

The next day was a Sunday, and Ephraim thought, as the bells began to ring, that he would watch and see if the Ryman went to church. But they did not seem to go; at least no one appeared. Just when he was about to give it up, he saw the girl of yesterday. She had come to one of the quaint windows, opened it, discovered him instantly, and sent him a free glance across while shaking out a handkerchief. The light hair was hanging in unrestrained curls around her brow, and a ray of the sun falling upon it made it shine like burnished gold.

Ephraim started back from the window quite distressed, and then from the back-ground of his room continued to look across. But he saw nothing more.

He heard that afternoon the piano begin at an unusually early hour, and as he was accustomed to look upon that as a signal he went across. To his astonishment he found Mr. Ryman with a broad-brimmed straw-hat on his head and a burning cigar in his mouth, sitting at the piano, and heard from him that the family intended to have a picnic.

Ephraim was all amazement and asked many questions, but before Ryman could answer, the door opened and in walked the fair-haired maiden with a bold step and a joyous face. She wore a small white hat with pink roses, a white dress of a very airy summer material, trimmed with pink, and had on her arm a small basket. Intuitively Ephraim looked at her feet. The shoes were the primitive work of a primitive shoemaker, but could not entirely conceal the exquisite form that Nature had given.

“Come, Adolf!” she said. “Father is waiting.”

Adolph raised his gigantic limbs slowly from his chair, nodded to his friend, and left.

Ephraim was still watching the girl and felt embarrassed by his friend's awkwardness, who did not introduce

him. But the fair maiden seemed to have as simple views about introductions as her brother, for she looked at Ephraim with a pleasant smile, and said : " Are you going with us ?"

" Oh, if you will permit me," he stammered.

" Then come along," she said, and he followed her.

On the landing stood an enormous elderly gentleman with a red face, and a lady of good size, also advanced in years.

" Did you take the cake, Flora ?" asked the lady.

" All is packed and nothing forgotten !" replied the girl.

" Lock the doors ; do you hear ?" said the old lady.

" Need not be mentioned," was the reply.

During this time the old gentleman looked curiously at Ephraim, who was modestly standing in the background.

" Mr. Steelyard," said the fair-haired girl, in explanation. " He will join us."

" Very pleasant !" said the elderly man, courteously raising his hat. He had the same calm repose and the same slow motions as his colossal son. The old lady looked benignly at Ephraim, and then the whole company set out on their excursion. Flora locked the last door and put the key into her basket.

" Odd people !" thought Ephraim. In his native town of Berlin he had been accustomed to a more careful investigation before new friendships were formed. They walked down some distance, when all made halt. Young Ryman uttered a melodious whistle, Flora called out with her clear, ringing voice, " Aunt Lotta !" and there appeared several heads in the windows. Then there was some trotting in the house, an elderly lady, two young girls and a half-grown lad in a gray coat with green collar and cuffs, appeared one by one in the house door,

were cordially greeted and asked what they thought of the weather. The two girls giggled when they became aware of Ephraim, and then they went on all together.

Old Mr. Ryman led the procession, followed by the two elderly ladies absorbed in a deep investigation into domestic affairs; next came Flora arm in arm with the two girls, behind them Ephraim, sorely embarrassed, and Adolf and the future forester closed the whole.

Ephraim suffered still under the impression which the young girl in the out-grown dress, with the swinging foot and the mighty inroad into the slice of buttered bread, had produced the day before. He could not help thinking of her brilliant blue eyes, the genuine golden hair and her lovely blush. This portrait disturbed his peace of mind. It had waked him early in the morning, had occupied his mind all these hours, and was now enforced by her companionship. He was mechanically walking behind her, and watched unconsciously her beautiful figure. She was made of the same wood as her brother, to whose shoulder she nearly reached, and was almost as tall as Ephraim himself. Her neck must have been uncommonly elastic, for although she was all the time walking straight ahead, she still could turn her joyous face quite often to Ephraim, and look at him as if she meant to say, "It is nice in you to have joined us."

Thus they went on and up, on this warm, clear afternoon in June, out of the city and into the mountains of the Neekar Valley, always with merry chatting and joyous laughing of the three girls. They would continually leave the road to run sideways after some bright flowers, winding wreaths and making bouquets, as much at home in nature as finches and sparrows. Flora gave all the Latin names of the flowers, looking at Ephraim as if anxious to display her learning. On this occasion how-

ever, it came out—no one knew how—that Flora had been sent away from school because she had been impudent. This made a painful impression upon Ephraim, who had always been a model pupil.

He felt very uncomfortable, besides, because he had no chance to say a word that should have sounded natural—he appeared to himself so stiff and awkward. Thus he joined the old father Ryman, and began to discuss with him the history of the country. Father Ryman, however, although a highly educated man and a judge of the district, did not seem to have very clear ideas of the past history of his native land, and answered only slowly and imperfectly. The son and his green cousin—as the cousins would call him—sent forth merry songs into the forest, and practiced jumping over every ditch to which they came. The only thing which consoled Ephraim as to the melancholy part he played in this joyous company, was that nobody seemed to mind him. They were all perfectly unconcerned, and apparently perfectly unconscious of his humor. Thus they climbed from mountain to mountain, enjoying the beautiful views, until at last they reached the Spire Farm, a kind of inn situated in the very heart of a magnificent old forest. Here they took possession of a table in the garden; the heated, glowing girls unpacked the baskets, while young Ryman brought wine from the restaurant. Many other families from town had come to this place, greetings were exchanged right and left, and it was a merry sight for one who belonged to the crowd. The baskets produced bread and cheese, ham and eggs, cold chicken and abundance of cake which Flora confessed to have baked with her own little hands, and which seemed to be rather different from ordinary cake. They ate and drank and laughed. Contrary to his habit Ephraim emptied several glasses, and began to feel a little more at home among his new

friends. After every morsel had been eaten and every drop had been drunk, Mamma Ryman and Aunt Lotta drew forth their knitting, Papa Ryman lit a long pipe, and Flora jumped up and proposed to play games.

The young people plunged into the forest, and when they had reached a spot which was lonely and entirely illumined by a greenish-golden light, under the proud, giant trees they began their games. They probably were very complicated and difficult, for Ephraim did not understand them in the least. Now they had to hide behind a tree, and now to jump out of the wood into the open space, then again places were exchanged and he who blundered gave a pledge. The main point in the game was evidently the redeeming of these pledges, which partly consisted in kissing. Ephraim was surprised at the facility with which he learned to laugh like the others, and to enter into the spirit of the thing. He had already discharged the ticklish duty of kissing the two cousins with somewhat less awkwardness than he had apprehended, when chance would have it that he now should kiss Flora also. An hour ago he would have deemed that simply impossible; now, however, after he had taken a good deal of wine and become as animated as his friends, he did not tremble much. Was it chance, or was Flora to blame, who directed all—but they found themselves at this moment at some distance from all the others. She looked at him with the sweetest smile in her eyes, and said, in a whisper, “Why are you so sad?” Then—he never knew which—he kissed her or she kissed him, two soft arms were around his neck, he felt as if a glowing cloud were all about and around him, and two sweet lips pressed upon his own, which entirely deprived him of his senses. The sky, the trees, the turf, all danced around him, and formed a great, unfathomable enigma, and when at last he was himself again, he was

standing alone and did not know was he awake or dreaming.

When a sick man has kept his room for many weeks and his mind has been weighed down day after day by anxious forebodings, so that he no longer notices the merry life of Nature, but looks upon the narrow walls of his sick room as the boundaries of the world, his first venture into the open air, his first drive out to the fields and forests is apt to make such an impression upon him that his surroundings appear to him strange and almost oppressive. The winds of heaven intoxicate him and the light of the sun is too dazzling.

Thus Flora's lips seemed to possess some magic power to open the heavy gates which shut out living Nature from Ephraim's oppressed mind. He looked into Nature and knew it no more. It had become another Nature. There were, to be sure, the same straight old trees yet standing, and above was still the green roof of leaves ; even the shrubbery which ranged itself around like scenery on the stage, was still there around their playground—but there was a certain something there, also, which had not been there before. The barriers seemed to have been broken down that separated him from the outer world, so that light and life, that were filling the world with their beauty, sent their waves also through him and his heart, and this new sensation made him unspeakably happy. He looked at little Flora, who was offering one of her cousins a bunch of wild strawberries with the utmost unconcern, with a gratitude which threatened to melt his heart, as if it had been made of wax. Then he entered into their games with a spirit and a cleverness at which he was himself surprised. He felt as if he had springs in his feet, and the rules were now as clear to him as if he had himself invented the game. He undertook to arrange the amusements in

Flora's place, and proposed a dance on the green turf. He danced with the cousins, he danced with Flora, he danced once more with the cousins, and he would not have been in the least surprised if he had suddenly risen into the air and continued to dance up there. But no; Adolf and the forester were thirsty, and at their suggestion all returned to the restaurant.

The parents here found that it was late and time to go home, but the young people thought differently. Ephraim ordered some of the best wine in the cellars at his own expense, which all of them considered a sign of high breeding, while the two thirsty youths were enthusiastic in their admiration. Thus they stayed till the shadows of the trees extended infinitely and a blue haze veiled the heights.

Ephraim was an inexhaustible talker; jests and humorous remarks poured from his lips, and he completely controlled the conversation. They all looked at him in amazement, and could not comprehend where the wooden young man had all of a sudden found so much fire and spirit. He himself was surprised at the large fund of funny stories and witty sayings which had been lying idle within him, and now sprang forth like the water from the rock which Moses bade come forth with his rod. He poured out perfect fireworks over the two families which were here represented, so that they were dumbfounded, while Flora's eyes never left him, and he saw it! She was lost for the world and rocked to sleep by the sound of his voice, and he felt it! But now it began to grow dark, and Father Ryman cleared his throat in a very ominous manner. "Now it is time, I think," he said slowly, and filled a new pipe for the return home.

They broke up. Father Ryman went at the head, then came Aunt Lotta and Mamma Ryman, behind them

the two young men, each with a girl on his arm. With splendid voices they all sang National and popular songs. Ephraim was the last, and had little Flora on his arm. He was happy, happier than he had ever been! Darker and darker grew the forest, and a soft breeze passed through the branches. On the distant horizon sheet-lightning flashed up at times, and distant thunder, slowly passing away, rolled along the heights. She clung closer and closer to him and her hair at times touched his cheek. He heard her deep breathing, he felt the beating of her heart, and from time to time a low shivering passing through all her limbs.

“Are you afraid?” he asked her.

“Oh, no!” she replied; “only I feel the lightning before it comes. When I dress my hair it crackles, and when I comb it in the dark the sparks are always flying about.”

Ephraim found himself back in Heidelberg when he thought he had but just started to return. He bade good-night to the cousins and their parents, Melia by name, and heartily shook hands with all the members of the Ryman family before the old house. Then he went to bed and slept till morning in a state of perfect bliss.

He awoke and tried to remember where he was. “How beautiful my dreams have been!” he at first said to himself. Then he remembered having been on an excursion into the country and having kissed a very pretty damsel. “She was sent away from school because of impudence—how badly that sounds! I wonder what kind of impudence that may have been? No doubt some harmless, simple remark which displeased the stiff old teacher who taught her, because he was too simple-minded to comprehend the Divine, the holy, the pure in a little girl’s innocent head. The essentially womanly is beyond the majority of men, as they rarely ever understand the truly beauti-

ful in man. Eternal womanhood is too high for them. He recalled every step he had taken yesterday in Flora's company. He let her kiss him once more and hopped around with her on the green turf. The impression, however, was not the same as yesterday. His eyes seemed to look through different glasses this morning. He felt ashamed, and began to fear that he had not acted exactly as became the pupil of Aristotle.

He looked up full of penitence, and dared not gaze, as usual, at the old house opposite. "These good, simple-minded people," he said to himself, "these child-like minds, touching and venerable in their old Germanic hospitality, like their old dwelling rich in memories, let you come to them and stay in their midst, without thinking of the danger which you brought into their pure and chaste circle. And you—you had nothing better to do than to mislead that innocent child! Are you really the demon that approached this holy maid? She did not know her own heart—like the flower of the field she was unconscious of her own beauty, for I have seen how she neglects her appearance and adorns herself only to please her parents. And yet her heart, like every young maiden's heart, holds the germs of destruction within it, to lead her to the abyss as soon as the tempter approaches, for she has easily excitable blood coursing through her veins, mind, readiness of wit, and joy in every kind of pleasure. All the more you ought to have been cautious lest you should become the tempter! But you are bad! Now only I see why Nature has made me unhappy. The sun on high is too mighty for me—mountains and valleys and rivers I cannot destroy, but to destroy a rose—that I am able to do and I draw pleasure from such destruction!"

He sank contrite into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

“Stern discipline will I inflict upon myself,” he said, getting up after long meditation ; “never again shall joy lead me astray ! I will drink nothing but water. I will never look at the old house again. I will never more listen to the tempting notes of music.”

He sat down to his work and studied all day. He did not look across the street. When in the afternoon the piano was heard, he stopped his ears with cotton. He did not go to lecture in order not to see the young man who would bring the features of his sister to his memory.

Ephraim had not left his rooms for three days. He had even sent for his meals, lest he should come once more into contact with that seductive outer world. Then, however, on the fourth day, when the piano had been playing a full half hour, and he had already gathered sufficient courage to hear it without imitating Ulysses in his precaution against the siren’s song, he heard his name called out. He turned quite pale, and the blood stood still in his veins.

“Hallo ! Ho !” somebody called out there with a powerful voice, and a wild echo came across the street.

Ephraim stepped to the window.

Over there in the corner window appeared young Ryman’s mighty bust, who asked across, “Are you sick ?”

Ephraim hesitated. “You have not caught cold, I hope, on our excursion ?”

“Oh, no !” replied the hermit of three days.

“Why do you play owl then in your nest ? Come over here,” called out Adolf.

This was too much. Ephraim took his hat and went over, but he went with slow, hesitating steps.

“What atrocious want of consistency,” he said to himself. “Revenge, no doubt, will come. This day may

decide the whole life's fate of this young girl! Your reappearance casts a new firebrand into her susceptible, innocent heart. How will she look at you? What a tempest must be raging in her little heart!"

He stopped at the door of the old house and thought it might be better to turn back. But would not that be ridiculous? What could he tell Mr. Ryman senior? "Perhaps you will not see her to-day," he comforted himself.

He went up-stairs. Flora was out on the landing watering her flowers. His heart beat as high as his throat. He only saw her profile and was not sure whether she had seen him yet. But she must hear his steps. He took off his hat at all events. Flora did not see it. He was surprised and said, "Good-evening, Miss Ryman!" Flora turned her back entirely to him and said, "Good-day!" Her tone could not have been more indifferent if she had spoken to the butter-woman.

Ephraim was thunderstruck. He felt as if somebody had poured a bucket of water over his head, but he soon recovered, and said angrily: "Do you care so little for me?"

"Why? You do not care for me," she answered.

"How so?" he asked in great surprise.

"Must I tell you?" she asked, turning round to face him reproachfully.

"Yes."

She made a wry face and turned away from him.

"I should like to know it," he continued, and at that moment he felt as if he had been a great fool the last three days.

"Well," she replied, "it would have been but common courtesy to come over and to inquire how we all felt after the excursion. The distance is not very great!"

Ephraim suddenly felt as if the Eternal Womanly was

several steps higher than Flora, through whom it assumed a very home-bred appearance. He had fancied he would find her overcome with fears, repentance, confusion, sorrow, and now all of a sudden he found that his little Flora had never lost her balance during these days—as he assuredly had—and that she saw nothing at all in his remaining away from her but a want of politeness.

Even her voice did not sound quite as delicate, and he could suddenly well understand that she should have been expelled from school because of impudence.

“You are right. I beg your pardon,” he said calmly. Then he went in and found Adolf there, just as usual, very unattractive. Ephraim determined to break off the intimacy. “These people are made of too ordinary clay,” he said to himself. “I would not profit by my intercourse with them in any way. I ought to have known that from their singing so correctly. I have never yet met with a really clever and finely organized man who could sing correctly. It is well the story is at an end.”

He left to meditate again on the *Lex Agraria*, which he meant to investigate in its bearings on the Roman Republic, for a scientific essay. Of Flora not a trace.

But as he stepped out of the house into the street, a rose fell from above right before his feet, and when he looked up in great surprise, he caught a small sheen of golden hair, which was rapidly vanishing from the corner window. He picked up the rose and went home, but the *Lex Agraria* was swallowed up in the stream of oblivion; golden curls and blue eyes were instead swimming on top of the waves of life. He thought and thought, now of this and now of that, the whole evening, and after he had been lying a whole hour sleepless in bed, he struck his forehead and murmured: “Hauton timorumenos!”

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE ROSES.

Ephraim awoke with an overflowing heart, full of incomprehensible longing, and as it were in poetic intoxication. It was a soft, warm day, and the breezes coming down from the mountains brought burning torches to his soul. He hastened out of town with his hot, heavy brow, through the paths under the trees, forming avenues in one place, and picturesque clumps and groups in other places.

“Oh, my bliss, when wilt thou come to me also? Did I come too late into this world, or perhaps too soon,—has God given me my life only to take it back again, without my ever having been happy on earth? Oh, come, my happiness, do not keep me waiting too long, or this feeble body will be consumed that was to enjoy thee!” He threw himself under a linden tree and gazed up at the emerald dome. A leaf fell straight into his face. He took it in his hand and examined it. “Is not there a verse about a leaf of a linden tree?” he said to himself again. “It winds up thus, or nearly thus: ‘You will find it shaped like a heart, therefore lovers love best of all to sit beneath a linden tree!’ Lovers! How I envy them! How I envy every young man who is able to drown the languor of his soul, who can quench the thirst that consumes him within! Why could not I love like others? The fair maid provokes me, she quarrels with me, she throws roses at me, and I might try to love her. Of course it would end fatally and bring unhappiness to all whom I approach. But no matter! Better your heart breaks

of the rose, than that you do not know love and die without love ! But how can I love her ? She is made of such different stuff ! She is one of a sound, strong and hearty race, a true German, and there is something, I know not what, in her, that is foreign to my nature. They are too coarse-grained for me, these Germans ; in their presence I feel the blood of my fathers moving within me, the blood of the oldest race on earth,—of the people of the Lord !”

Wearied and fatigued by roaming about and hard thinking, his head sank on his arm and he fell asleep under the linden tree. After a while he awoke and felt a better man. He went on and became aware that he was hungry and thirsty, and when he looked at his watch he found to his amazement that it was four o'clock in the afternoon. And he had left his house early in the morning ! Fortunately, he soon discovered, after striking a public road, a house that looked inviting. Before the door he saw a vine-covered porch, under which two young men were discussing a bottle of wine. As he came nearer, he recognized in one the future forester with the green collar and cuffs ; the other was a student. He joined them and ordered something to eat.

The view before the lonely inn was enchanting. Below, the river moved slowly along here in its quiet, shining way ; on the other slope the hills, in ever-changing hues, presented here vineyards and there tilled fields, with groups of trees scattered about, and in the far distance the colors melted all into a beautiful lilac, and one could not tell where the earth ended and where the sky began. “How these two German youths enjoy life !” Ephraim said to himself. Brownd by exposure to air and sun, rosy-cheeked, and with brilliant eyes from the fiery wine they had drunk, they chatted and laughed and felt themselves lords of creation. He felt kindly towards

both of them, they were so simple and so natural! He looked at them with the same pleasure that the sight of a pair of fine horses or of slow-walking, high-bred steers would have given him. He ate and drank and carried on a merry conversation with them. For a short hour at least, he felt as if he also were a young man who belonged to the world and was like other men.

The conversation turned upon the excursion which he had made with the Ryman and where they had become so intimate. "You are not a first cousin of my friend Ryman?" Ephraim asked the lad.

"Well, no; the connection is rather distant, and I could not easily trace it here, but we have been used, from childhood up, to call them uncle and aunt."

"Have you also been used to kiss them?" asked Ephraim, suddenly seized with a painful feeling in his heart.

"Ah," said the youth, pulling out his tobacco pipe, "if so, I would probably not have been the only one."

"I should think so," said the student. "Little Flora is a kind-hearted, good girl."

"Do you also know her?" asked Ephraim.

"I have only met her a few times, and once or twice I have danced with her."

"And also kissed her once or twice?" cried Ephraim, with a forced laugh.

"Oh, no! not so fast!" was the reply. "I do not care much for women—those are *tempi passati*."

Mr. Ryman raised the big green bottle, held it against the light, and regarded with a sigh the little wine that was still left at the bottom.

"Heaven knows," he said, "we must have eaten new herrings to-day; I have a thirst that is colossal in its wrath."

“For thirst there is no better remedy than drink,” said the student, and knocked on the table.

The pretty waitress appeared, was pleased when the student pinched her round arms, and went to get a new bottle.

“With us,” said the student, “at our drinking bouts everybody is thirsty ; we empty our glass and sing,

‘Salt, salt, salt is the sea
How could it otherwise be ?
Is it not full of herrings ? ’ ”

And thus they drank glass after glass and grew merry and gay. Once more the student brought out a reminiscence of his student’s life when he quoted St. Augustine as saying : “The soul, which is a spirit, cannot live without spirit—though it be but wine !”

When this bottle was empty, the two young men declared that they must start or they would be too late. It now appeared that they were on their way to the forester and had only turned in here to rest awhile, or, as they called it, to refresh the inner man. They invited Ephraim to accompany them, as the day was gone by and he could not go to lecture any more. Then he tried to settle the matter by telling Ephraim that Cousin Flora, with the two cousins, were all on a visit at the forester’s, and would be delighted to see them all come. The afternoon was beautiful. The sun shone in its purest, golden light, a mild, fresh air played in the tops of the trees, the little forest-birds twittered merrily, and sang, hopping from branch to branch, and rejoiced in life, the bees were humming around the flowers busy gathering their first tribute, beetles and butterflies darted to and fro, and all nature seemed to invite man for once to be as wise as the animals are, to give up meditations and to enjoy life.

Thus at least it seemed to Ephraim, who could think of nothing better than to accompany the youngsters and to serve as an escort for the lonely maidens, when they should attempt returning through the dark forest.

Thus they came, an hour later, to a lovely valley, all around enclosed by well-wooded heights, and in one corner, where a little mountain brook formed a pretty, purling cascade, stood the forester's lodge. A deep barking received them and soon two beautiful, thoroughbred Irish setters welcomed them, recognizing young Ryman as soon as their noses touched his clothes.

The forester's lodge was built after the pattern of Swiss cottages, the roof projecting several yards, and on the outer end supported by heavy beams coming out from the walls. Thus they formed, on three sides of the house, a cosy, well-sheltered verandah, where Ephraim noticed, with great inner satisfaction, a number of quiet, contemplative seats, on which two kindred souls might pleasantly exchange sentiments. How sweet it must be here when great heat was brooding in the valley, or when the rain came gently down upon the firs and spruces and diffused an aromatic odor far and near! In the meantime the clouds had lowered and the evening haze was covering all with a transparent veil, and now they all gathered in the front room, where the windows came down to the ground and the creepers and climbers peeped in anxiously. For the whole house was covered with all kinds of utterly useless but joyous creepers, roses, wisteria, ivy, so that the dark red timber, of which the house was built, could hardly be seen, and the colossal stag's head over the front door could only peep through the confusion of branches and the masses of flowers and leaves.

This close foliage embraced with its tenacious hold also the pillars which supported the gallery above,

covered this gallery itself, which ran around the second story of the stately house, and actually began to mount to the roof, so as to furnish an innumerable supply of hiding places for the swallows that flew continually to and fro and around, in the merry enjoyment of motion. Finally, as Ephraim was following it with gratified looks all about the house, it furnished the loveliest frame for a blooming face with radiant blue eyes, which, adorned with golden curls, more charming and refreshing than all the roses about, was looking down from the gallery, and sent the sweetest smile he had ever seen down to the good youth.

This was so charming, so enchanting, that Ephraim closed his eyes and then opened them again, curious to see if this was a dream or if Flora Ryman was really there smiling down upon him? No, it was really so, and he took off his hat with a courteous bow, which she returned with a slow nodding of the head, as if she were absorbed in deep meditation. This gentle bowing of the head filled Ephraim with all kinds of strange sensations, and he felt a strong inclination to go up-stairs in the gallery, and to begin once more such a sweet conversation as in the dark forest, with the sweet, dear girl.

His two companions had their hands full, to speak to the forester, to inquire after the health of good Lever-sham, the faithful gamekeeper whom poachers had severely wounded, to praise the dogs, to admire a new self-loader, and to tease a fox which the forester kept chained behind the house. Ephraim did not appreciate these topics and with beating heart made his way up-stairs. As if guided by an invisible genius he promptly found the door leading to the gallery, and a few moments later was sitting opposite little Flora, who sat there in the half-veiled green as in a bower, and was quite alone. The cousins had gone to meet the young men, and were now,

as the growling and snarling in the courtyard and loud laughter proclaimed, busy teasing the arch-robber in company with the young men.

Ephraim was greatly embarrassed finding Flora alone, and knew not what to say. She rested her snow-white arm on the railing, her head on her hand, and looked at him, smiling at his confusion. Her hair shone more brightly than ever, the beautiful complexion of her well-shaped countenance, the blue eyes, the long dark lashes, a curling twist of hair that hung on her brow, all this had something embarrassing for Ephraim, and made him lose all self-control.

He suddenly remembered his resolution never again to approach the girl, and felt with terror into what danger he had rushed of a sudden. He could not even remain sitting still or speaking of indifferent subjects; he was compelled by an invisible power, to give doleful utterance to his feelings.

“Miss Flora,” he began, “I did not know you were here, or I should not have ventured to come up. I mean,” he continued, his confusion increasing all the time, as she looked him in the face marveling, “I mean you are too beautiful for my peace and I had better avoid you. I began to fear when I was near you. I fear I am speaking discourteously and confusedly, but that is not my fault. It must be that there is a demon within me, who rules me when I see you. For I lose my consciousness altogether, and am, so to say, drifting down a mighty river. I hoped so much to see you again—really, I rejoiced at the idea, and now I feel as if I were standing near an abyss. Pardon me! I only wished to explain to you why I cannot stay here and must never see you again. I did not know you would have such great power over me. I must bid you farewell. Pardon me, and farewell!”

He was going to run away after these words, but Flora looked at him with such an enchanting, bewitching smile, and that so pitifully, that he stood still, quite overcome.

Then she seized his hand and made him sit down opposite to her. Flora had understood his words very differently from what he had intended. She had heard her brother say that Ephraim was a very great scholar, and she was, on the other hand, convinced that learned men were always a little demented, and hence she felt it the duty of sheltering and protecting woman to hold out a saving hand to such a somnambulist.

“All that you tell me there,” she said in a low voice and with cast down eyes, “proves to me that you love me, only I cannot comprehend why you should be so frightened by that! I will not conceal from you that your love is to me a source of unspeakable delight.”

“Oh, Miss Ryman!” said he, blushing.

“And you mean to banish me from your presence because your love fills you with apprehension. A bold and brave lover you are forsooth! And what more could you do to me if you hated me? However, I beg to assure you, if the love I inspire is such a very bad thing, that I never intended to do you such grievous harm. And yet—I cannot help it. I must tell you how greatly, how very greatly I rejoice in your love!”

Ephraim raised his hands with an imploring gesture, and thought his heart would burst with such bliss and such fear, as she tenderly looked at him once more.

“I well know,” she continued very wisely, “the dangers to which love exposes us, but can we not face them and defeat them? I am only at a loss to know how I can take this matter so lightly, when you, a great scholar,—and, brother tells me the most learned man in the University—seem to be quite terrified? You look so pale and sick—you excite my profoundest sympathy.”

“Oh, Miss Flora!” cried Ephraim, and pressed her hand.

“Is it love that makes you sick? But love is not a disease, and upon me it has the opposite effect. All the morning I had some foreboding that you would come, and when you came, I was so glad. Ah, my dear doctor, if love is a pain for you, I pity you with all my heart; but surely you cannot be the only one born on earth destined never to love.”

“Dearest Flora! Dearest!” said Ephraim, melting away in gratitude.

“I will cheerfully do whatever you may order me to do,” she replied. “If you wish it, I’ll never see you again, but I shall never cease to think of you—that is impossible for me! I shall never let you see me again, for it is better for you to live without love than to die because I love you!”

“Oh, no, no! that was not my meaning!”

“Well, then,” she said, passing her hand over her eyes, for she did not quite trust her tears, “then we must see if there is not perhaps some other way to recover? Your remedy is too doleful. Propose another, and put a little more confidence in your little Flora.”

With these words she had gently seized Ephraim’s hand, and before he knew what had happened, he held her frail little figure in his arms and pressed his burning lips on the red lips of the philosopher-maiden.

A strange thing happened. Ephraim had always and everywhere maintained that the greatest misfortune that could befall him would be the loss of his clear mind and the drowning of his reason in the waters of logic, and now, when this calamity really befell him, under Flora’s kisses and in her soft arms, he felt by no means such depth of misery.

In most tender conversation, often interrupted by a

flood of kisses, which, however, never broke the connection, they sat there a long time in sweetest, closest embrace, in the dark niche of roses under the cozy old roof. Her golden curls hung over his brow and his short black hair; his lips burnt on her cheeks, on her eyes, and on her tiny hands, which playfully tried to catch hold of his. In the meantime, however, events went on in the lower part of the house, and soon made it impossible for the two happy ones to remain sitting up there in united bliss forever. However interesting the fox was, and although the inspection of all the out-buildings, with the cows and horses and dogs in their stables and kennels, had taken up many hours, still the time for supper approached, and the forester's helpmeet concluded her work in kitchen and cellar by having the table set before the house, where the last rays of the sun still afforded light enough.

With a loud voice she summoned her guests, and her call startled also the loving pair in their dark but blissful solitude. No searching eyes, no indiscreet question annoyed the two as they timidly descended. The forester's wife had too important cares to attend to to be grieved if four lips met behind her back and gave rise to a slight explosion. What could it be? The husband, again, was too busy with his pupils and subordinates, as well as his dogs, to do more than to entertain his rational guests. The young people had, of course, noticed the disappearance of Ephriam and Flora, but were too wise to interfere with other people's enjoyment.

On the snow-white table-cloth, with a forester's device woven in the centre, stood delicious brown bread, steaming hot; new, yellow forest butter; rosy ham with white edges on green parsley, cold haunch of venison, preserved fruit and early new fruit—at the same time in tall goblets the golden juice of the native grape, made

by the forester's people, and kept in his own cellar. It was still light enough to see distinctly how well the things looked that tasted so well—and yet the gloaming lent a peculiar, familiar charm to the meal which the midday sun never affords. Ephraim sat opposite Flora and felt in heaven. Every one of her looks, every one of her gestures was but for him. She smiled as she raised her glass, and he knew she was drinking his health. At first he had been very quiet, sunk in the memory of his recent happiness, but soon the lively spirits that animated all around, roused him also, the good wine in the glass enlivened his tongue, and he became once more the gayest of table companions. Neither the witty student nor the cunningly slow cousin could compete with him in funny stories and in witty anecdotes, so that all wondered again at the immensely clever young man, who a few hours before had sat facing the bottle and never saying a word.

And now the hour came for the return. The two young cousins naturally chose their well-known young friends, and thus it came as a matter of course that Ephraim had to escort little Flora. They went into the house to fetch wraps and cloaks, pipes and canes, shawls and umbrellas, and Ephraim proved most skillful. It was he who found Flora's little fichu in the dark, and when he put it on her shoulders, he did it so carefully that the timid maid found time to turn round and to offer him her lips over her shoulder.

Cordial thanks were given for the hospitable entertainment, and the forester's hand and his wife's were cordially shaken—till they felt it. They were singing in subdued tones as soon as they entered the forest; the dogs added their barking, and the soft air of the woods blew caressingly around the brown old house in its hospitality, when the three pairs, arm in arm, crossed the threshold.

Fresh and fast they marched along down into the valley in the direction of Heidelberg, and it was worthy of admiration that Ephraim and Flora did not stumble once over the gnarled roots, nor fell down any of the numerous abysses by the way-side. It is true they supported each other mutually, closely clinging one to the other, and Eros was their protector.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE BOSOM OF THE HAPPY FAMILY.

The wife—she preferred being called “the lady”—of the Member of the Imperial Diet and Bank President Comet, was crouching, in an old dress of purple silk, which she meant to utilize in the morning hours, on an old, worn-out, brick-red sofa, casting up accounts in a huge household book that was lying open before her on the breakfast table. The yellow strings of an old full-dress bonnet fell from the uncombed head upon the pages covered with ciphers.

Opposite her sat a young girl, beautiful in face and figure, whose graceful carriage and choice costume formed a striking contrast to her mother’s negligent appearance. Her well-shaped head, her delicate features, her large black eyes with the beautifully traced eyebrows, her rosy lips forming the classic bow, and her mass of rich, fancifully arranged hair, all bespoke great wealth, supporting Nature’s choicest gifts. Her movements were graceful and elegant, and the whole impression she produced was that of a well-bred, clever young lady.

But the lack of harmony between mother and daugh-



FLORA SAT THERE PERFECTLY UNCONCERNED.—See Page 55.

ter seemed not to stop there, but to extend to the room also. It was high and large and well furnished. The floor was inlaid wood, the ceiling frescoed, and the hangings of green velvet with narrow gold bands. The furniture, however, seemed to consist of specimens of every age and every nation on earth, some of the pieces being in wretched condition, faded, worn-out, broken or defaced. The great statesman's "lady" had bought them in the early days of their wedded life, and had never been able to part with them since. Thus it came about that some chairs were of walnut, others of mahogany, some covered with sadly faded blue cloth, others with rich gold brocade. A flower-stand, overgrown with ivy, would have given some rest to the weary eye, but alas! no flowering plants were there, and the immense Aquarium, once the glory of the room, was now filled with dim, dirty water, without a living being. In spite of the almost disgusting and disgraceful condition of this room, it was the favorite place of Mrs. Comet, who preferred it to all and any of the really superbly furnished rooms of the mansion. Strangely enough, she felt well and happy here in the midst of this disorderly and untidy collection of second-hand articles, as she also infinitely preferred her antiquated and thoroughly worn-out dresses to the elegant and fashionable costumes which Worth and others masters of that ilk sent her upon her husband's orders. Light, harmony and brilliancy were to her as acceptable and pleasant as light may be to a bat.

Mrs. Rachel, as the servants had gotten into a habit of calling their mistress, before the Comet had risen to the zenith, cherished that genuine love for small and petty things which so often accompanies wealth acquired by speculation. And yet she felt real reverence for this wealth. At the same time her naturally very strong mind, and her truly good nature made her on one

hand fond of intellectual discussions and on the other anxious to help the poor and to watch over the home-budget. Her one great aim in life was, just now, to educate her children for the highest social positions that might be attainable. She studied Adam Smith and Malthus, whom she knew through her erudite brother, the professor, and never saw the stains in her carpets nor the tears and rents in her velvet curtains and eastern portières, nor even the monstrous character of her own toilet. When the great man, her husband, proposed—as he often did—to move the old worthless furniture out of sight, she called him a spendthrift, who invested his money in unsafe funds on superfluous articles, instead of saving it for a rainy day. She reproached him for not being able to appreciate a thrifty wife, not knowing what a blessing she was, who did not strut about in silk and satin, in gold and costly jewels, but modestly and simply lived in a style which even a mechanic's wife might look down upon. At this moment she was busy comparing the state of her pantry with the butcher's and the green grocer's bills that were lying before her.

“Why do you wear your fine plaid dress in the house, Sylvia?” she asked.

Miss Sylvia, with her keen black eyes, looked coldly at her mother, continued her embroidery, and said in a sharp voice :

“Do you want me to wear it in the street, or at the Subscription Ball?”

The mother sighed and made no reply ; she was busily counting the eggs that had been consumed during the month.

“We cannot go on this way any longer,” she complained. “The waste is too great. How can it be—only six score in the pantry ! Who eats them all ? Can the servants have access to the place ?” And thus she went on and

on, interrupted only by deep sighs, till the daughter calmly said : "I cannot comprehend, mamma, how you can be so ! You know, of course, that in a house like this, where domestic expenses count by thousands, a saving of a few dollars in eggs or butter can be of no earthly importance. And still you keep on saving the pennies ! How could you come to think of counting the eggs ? With twenty or twenty-five servants in the house—worthless enough I admit—what can a few dozen eggs be to you in comparison ? You economize in the table, and the consequence is that papa very rarely takes a meal at home. You save a dollar and papa dines for ten elsewhere !"

Mrs. Rachel was distressed ; she felt her daughter's want of filial love deeply, but had not the energy to face her boldly. She looked up to her own children because they were so much more highly cultivated than she was, and felt especially a certain dread of Sylvia's great elegance and haughty carriage. It was rarely only that her anger broke forth, as now :

"Oh ! oh !" she said, "you are aiming high, my poor little doll. You will find that out when you are your dear Frank's wife, a poor architect—I assure you I feel sorry for both of you !"

Sylvia shrugged her shoulders. Mrs. Comet was in specially good humor to-day, for this was the day when her tailor came. He came only once a week, but he brought perfect bliss in his cartons and boxes. Mrs. Comet used to begin her lamentations the evening before, pitying herself that she had to make her few dresses herself, and that, with the assistance of a rude person who knew nothing himself, and to whom she had first to show what to do ! And when he had left, and she examined what he had done, then the whole task had to be turned over once more and altered, till she was "dead beat" and

tired. Other wives fared a great deal better. She did not believe there was a lady of her years and social position who was as modest as she was. For long years her husband had ceased to make any reply to these reproaches. He had learned by bitter experience that all he could say served only, like oil poured on a fire, to increase the conflagration. In fact, these meetings with the famous man-tailor had become a want and an enjoyment for the good lady. He was the only person on God's earth with whom she felt genuine sympathy. They had known each other nearly forty years, from the time when he, a Parisian, had first appeared in Berlin, opened his "Magazine"—"store," was too plebeian for M. Grand Poulet—and sought her patronage. She reaped her reward now, and the bread cast upon the waters so long ago came back to her now a hundred fold. She had friends and acquaintances in the highest circles, as many as she chose to have, for all paid court to the eminent statesman's eccentric wife. But all that she could discuss with these people and their wives and daughters, had little charm for the poor woman, and nobody made her feel this more keenly than her own child, Sylvia. Her beautiful black eyes rested contemptuously on the poor old lady, and she did not deem it worth while to say anything more. She took lessons in singing, and her physician had advised her, to counteract an attack of laryngitis, to eat every morning a yolk of an egg, beaten up with brown sugar and Madeira. Every morning a slight skirmish took place on this subject, for the mother refused to surrender the key to the pantry where the precious sugar was stored away. She always hoped to be able to break her daughter's stubborn will by perseverance. She insisted upon it that the yolk was bad for the throat, that the physician was an ignoramus, and that she herself had never eaten such a thing, nor suffered of hoarseness in all her life.

But Sylvia was of the same flesh and blood as her mother, and possessed the same tenacity. The more difficulties her path showed, the better she liked it, and she never allowed a morning to come that she did not demand her egg! To-day, also, the war broke out as usual, and ended with Sylvia's triumph. Mrs. Comet drew the key from her pocket, handed it to her daughter with the admonition to return it, and then Sylvia went away.

"Where is my key?" asked the mother.

"Pshaw! Your wretched old keys," replied the dutiful daughter. "In the door where it belongs," she added. But Mrs. Comet did not think so, and made herself so disagreeable, that Sylvia, with all her pride and stubbornness, had to go and bring the key. She came back with quick, violent steps, threw the key with a gesture of contempt at her mother's feet, and went out of the room.

But the old lady had her sweet revenge. A letter came for Sylvia; it was written by Mr. Frank, the young engineer to whom she was engaged, but who was too poor as yet to marry her. Now Mrs. Comet's feelings for poverty were curiously divided.

Her heart loved the poor, but her mind despised them. Thus she despised also her brother, Doctor Steelyard, and his whole family. She even despised in this sense, her own husband. She could not forgive him for having married her when she was so poor. That was such folly that, after that, she had no more confidence in his judgment, although he was now a millionaire. On the same account she was violently opposed to her daughter Sylvia's engagement with Mr. Frank, the poor architect. She had not been able to prevent the engagement, but she was determined not to consent to their marriage.

Sylvia, she thought, was such a clever girl—she would surely come to her senses before the appointed day.

Her husband had been half inclined to consent to the match. He had enough to pay his daughter a handsome allowance without impoverishing his two sons. But Mrs. Rachel had so far prevented a day to be fixed, representing to him that it would be better for all of them to wait till Frank should have an independent position, and thus be able to support a wife. "That they will never accomplish," she said to herself. Frank was far too simple ever to succeed in life. But in the truly wonderfully constructed character of this strange woman, another element came and claimed attention. This same Frank had such a truly winsome, open heart, that she had learned to love him, and now she persuaded herself that this love wished her to save him from the union with Sylvia, which, she told herself, never could turn out well. "As long as he is what he now is," she said to herself, "a harmless, truly good lad, I will not let him fall a victim to a scourge like Sylvia."

CHAPTER VIII.

A CUNNING BRIDE.

On the same forenoon on which Mrs. Rachel was thinking over the fine dress which she was to wear on the occasion of a great fête which was to take place at the end of the week, Sylvia also had a serious interview with her betrothed.

His visits were not frequent, because he knew he was not a welcome visitor here, and thus Sylvia generally let

him know when and *where* he might meet her. She put on her sealskin coat, then the cap to match, and for the benefit of curious observers, she took a large red morocco portfolio with her golden monogram, which held her music, ordered a cab and drove to the entrance to the park. Near the magnificent city-gate she dismissed the cab and walked resolutely through the gate, while a sharp rain beat her straight in the face, and small, fleecy clouds chased each other on high. A young man, a Rembrandt hat on his light curls, and in a short blue coat after the latest pattern, came to meet her with joy in his face. She held his hand for a time in her's, looked at him, and with a sigh, she said : " Ah, how fair you are ! "

He threw back his head, laughed aloud and said : " Oh, you little darling fool ! "

Then he replaced the broad-brimmed hat which he had held in his hand during this affectionate meeting, took the red portfolio under his arm, drew Sylvia's arm under his own, and aided her to make her way through the crowd of carriages till they safely reached the trees of the glorious old park.

" Are you not a genuine little fool ? " he said. " How can you, enchanting being as you are, you modern model of classic grace, tell an uncouth animal of my calibre that he is fair ? Do you mean to destroy the one good thing that I thought I had in me, my modesty, as you have done with everything else, you heartless, unloving siren ? "

" Oh, Edward ! " she cried, " if you would speak a little less students' slang ! " But in spite of the reproof, she looked at him with genuine delight—for he was indeed fair to look at.

He was tall and lithe, small in the loins, broad in the shoulders and of a powerful chest. His face, browned and bronzed in Italy, shone with its piercing blue eyes, while a light down only curled on his upper lip and chin

without concealing the graceful outlines. Something exquisitely sweet and gentle, combined with manful courage, gave him an expression as rare as it was attractive. His face seemed to offer to every new-comer a fund of good will and ready trust, and thus elicited the same kindness and confidence in others. This irresistible charm, with such great beauty of form, had won Sylvia's heart, and made her resolved to encourage, in spite of all the difficulties she clearly foresaw, the young architect, till he ventured to ask for her hand. He was, of course, no match for the daughter of the great statesman, the millionaire, who might have chosen among many richer men in more brilliant position.

She clung affectionately to him, and arm in arm they walked slowly through the long green avenues, amid merry sallies. Gradually, however, the words became weightier, the tones graver.

"My sweetest Sylvia," he said, "how long shall we continue to live in this half concealed mummery? Does your father still refuse to give his consent, and must I really not see you at your own house? Look, darling dear, I am tired of single life, my lonely room is a prison-cell to me. Every hour, every minute, I long for you. I think we had better marry before old age creeps on us both!"

Sylvia smiled. "And how very old are you already?"

"You cannot imagine how old I am, my Sylvia. I have seen twenty-eight years."

"To be sure—what a hoary old age!"

"Yes; and yesterday I saw a home—as if it had been made for us and us alone on all this earth. It lies a little apart, you know where we saw the other day the new plantations just outside the city? Now listen and you will see how nice everything is! In the middle a large room with three windows—that might be a reception-

room ; on one side a smaller room—your boudoir ; on the other, my study. Next to these, two spacious bedrooms with all the conveniences of our day ; the same up-stairs for him ; you know for whom. Guest chambers, two, for we must not be extravagant. A small garden, a well, even a watch-dog ; in short, everything heart could wish, is there. I can get it for a song and for a capital reason. It has not yet been painted, and the owner, who is something of a Maecenas of the Fine Arts, wants me to add certain improvements, a loggia, some balconies and the like, for which I have promised him my personal assistance. He gives me the house in pure white. I paint him his walls and ceilings. You shall have a Pompeiian room, all red on black, fantastic creatures, divine landscapes, between columns adorned with creeping, clinging plants ; the salon—But you are laughing, my Sylvia. By Jupiter, I am in earnest—”

“How your imagination runs away with you, Edward,” she said, gracefully and merrily shaking her head. “Foolish as it is, I love to hear you.”

“Oh, Sylvia mine ! Do not call it foolish,” he replied, with a serious face. “I have a decided wish soon to get married. I figure to myself the bliss of living at your side in our modest little home, and sustained by you to create beautiful works in my profession ! There is nothing in this that you should dare call foolish.”

Sylvia hung her lovely little head. The picture she formed to herself of their future was very different from Edward Frank’s wishes and anticipations. At times she succeeded in painting happiness in a cottage quite poetically, especially when it was a cottage in the Tropics, and she, in her transparent gauze garment, swinging gently to and fro in her hammock, overshadowed by gigantic palm trees, was eating delicious bananas, while her Edward in his broad-brimmed Panama hat and his

costume of raw silk, brought her a tiger skin from his last hunt, and bright-colored humming birds darted to and fro across the landscape like so many living jewels. But her bliss in its reality, in Berlin, must be very different. It must have, for its foundation, an elegant mansion in the most fashionable part of town, with a spacious garden behind, and a square court-yard, with a noble entrance-gate in gilt bronze in front of the house. Carpets, sofas, curtains and portières, all of the latest art and material, an experienced, grave-looking butler, lackeys in gold-laced and gorgeous liveries, under a head and several under stewards; a French maid, well skilled in all the mysteries of a Rachel or a Ristori; a sober coachman or two, with Irish grooms, and two footmen six and a-half feet high, and with regulation calves. The house must assemble the best society, that Berlin had never yet been clever enough to harmonize in any genuine salon, like that of the Récamier or Mme. Adams. She wanted to see the statesmen of the Empire and the generals and great captains of the age in a circle around her, while genial painters stood about in graceful attitudes, leaning on the mantel-pieces, and vied with each other who could paint Sylvia's beauty most successfully, whilst on her two grand pianos—by Broadbent and Beckstein—artists of European celebrity played Liszt's last compositions or accompanied Sylvia when she sang, "Oh, thou my soul, my only soul." Bold and brave officers, whose dazzling uniforms and brilliant accoutrements contrasted wonderfully with the copper-colored, gold-stamped leather hangings on the walls, looked around to be able to tell their aristocratic friends and relatives how far the splendor of Mrs. Sylvia Frank's apartments surpassed the richest of their exclusive but old-fashioned houses. And, to crown the whole, she saw her husband, an Apollo in manly beauty, a semper of world-wide fame who was besought

and implored to build a mansion for a millionaire here, a castle for a count there, a palace for the Emperor himself, and to erect a Victoria column in many realms ; demands which kept him busy for long, long hours, but also made perfect streams of gold pour into his coffers, and enabled Sylvia to spend as she chose.

She did not like her husband's modest pretensions, and wished to rouse him to higher aspirations.

"Dear Edward," she said, after a pause, "I am sure under such circumstances, papa will not give his consent."

"And what circumstances does he require in order to give it?"

"Don't get angry, dear Edward, but papa says, 'Edward might, if he chose, do an enormous business. He is very talented, very industrious. I could give him letters, and he could, in a short time, become a very famous architect. But—'"

"But?" asked Edward, blushing all over.

"'But,' says papa, 'it is remarkable. Edward does not do anything solid—his income is problematic. He is too genial, too proud. How do I know—in short, I cannot give him my daughter until he is in such a position that I can let my child go to him without anxiety for the daily bread.'"

The beautiful and dutiful daughter of this wise father thereupon enlarged on his views, representing his peculiar character and his eccentricities in the most touching manner, dwelling upon his great love for his daughter and his well-founded anxiety for her welfare. She intermingled with great skill and cunning, flattering compliments, so that the betrothed never could feel hurt. The result was this : the millionaire would, of course, endow his daughter richly and suitably, but would not do it by actual donation, unless the son-in-law was able to show

by his success in his art that he was also a good man of business.

Edward Frank listened with perfect composure, but the cause of this calmness was not such as Sylvia could have wished. The fact was that his sense of beauty was so fully developed, and his sense of humor at the same time so powerful, that he soon commenced to admire the lively play of the features of the beautiful girl, her caressing and cajoling manners, her dark eyes and the merry play of lips and hands, and totally forgot the purport of her words, and her false reasoning, as it seemed to him.

He had the most exalted conception of his art, and was full of the conviction that the artist was a priest of beauty. He was determined never to sacrifice the smallest item of his principles for the sake of favor, money or applause, and it appeared to him simply impossible that he should ever do anything else but worship the beautiful.

He was, besides, young in years, of unbending energy, and had just returned from Rome, where he had led an ideal life, in perfect freedom, surrounded by the calm grandeur of gone-by centuries! He felt his dignity as a man and felt unconsciously that man ought to bind woman unto him, but never allow her, in all greater and higher questions, to warp his mind, or to weaken his resolves.

“Sylvia,” he said at last, as she was silent for a time, and then looked at him, inquiring, “if you really love me as I love you, you will find it, I think, an easy task to overcome all these difficulties of which you speak. Your father was not cast in bronze and is not carved out of marble. Our income is ready at hand. I can count upon an annual income that will enable us to live modestly, in the manner that is the best, the only happy one

for true lovers. We are richer than the whole world, if we love each other, and we are greater than all princes, when our friends are Raphael, Michael Angelo, Cornelius, Le Duc and Virgil and Horace and Homer."

"If those are to be our only friends—oh, Edward, that was not kind in you!" she said, sharply.

A painful sensation pierced his heart.

"Sylvia!" he cried.

She looked down and played in the sand with the point of her shoe, then she raised her eyes again to him, and he saw they were full of tears.

Sylvia had one brother, who was a lieutenant in a crack regiment of hussars, and another brother who had studied law and was now attached to a legation abroad; she also had an older sister who had married a major in the army. These brothers and the sister had nice friends, well-bred, high-standing and cultivated people, so that it was rather hard for Sylvia to think that she was to live in a suburb, in a small, unfinished house, and to have no intercourse but such as Edward had mentioned. When he saw her tears, his heart softened, and he feared he had spoken rather roughly.

"Pardon me," he said, "my dearest Sylvia, and come to my heart!" With these words he kissed her tears from her eyes. As he noticed that his kisses had a good effect, he continued the treatment, and began at the same time to speak of all and every petty matter he could think of and thus led her thoughts into another channel.

But he knew Sylvia's character very imperfectly if he fancied he had entirely changed her views. There was not a tree in the whole grand park so deeply rooted as Sylvia's plan of having a splendid existence, and the delicate, soft cheeks, the bright eyes, and the elegant, well-bred manners of the young lady, covered a tenacious obstinacy, of which Edward had but a very imperfect

conception, if he thought it would and could ever yield to love.

She loved Edward—there was no doubt of that—but she loved him in her own way. He was to be the husband she wanted. The only question was : Could she bend him so that he fitted into her model? Both were reflecting, as they returned, driven home by the rain from the fresh, green park into the desert of stone and brick, and both were more silent than usual. When Edward returned to his bachelor's home, he looked sighing around, and said :

“And thus it must remain for the present, I see.”

He paused before a plaster of Paris model, whose garment was pale blue, while the hair was like pale gold.

“I wish Sylvia could wear your Greek costume, you old Greek maid—how beautiful that would be! No fashion and no furniture! Oh, Sylvia, I wish you did not have that rich father, but could walk with me bare-footed through the streets of Athens!” With these impractical thoughts he went to a large blank canvas on an easel, and sketched Sylvia's likeness as a Greek maid. But he could not satisfy himself.

He reflected upon the beautiful, and the æsthetic lectures to which he had listened on the subject, but it was all in vain. His thoughts forever returned to Sylvia and the glimpse of her heart she had to-day allowed him to catch—for a purpose.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FAIR WEAPON.

Among the artistic works in which Edward Frank was now engaged, the most important, to him, was the re-building of a wing and the decoration of a magnificent dining-room in the castle of a Baron Rosen. He had been there a few days after his unprofitable conversation with Sylvia, to inspect the building, and was returning late, traveling third-class to spare his slender purse. He was in good humor, for the baron had shown great artistic culture, such as he had till now rarely met among his patrons, and he had determined, in order to show his appreciation, to add, as a present, some very valuable frescoes to the dining-room. He was deeply absorbed in these thoughts and had paid but little attention to his traveling companions, when he became suddenly aware of a female figure in the opposite corner, which attracted him by bearing a faint, fleeting likeness to Sylvia.

It was dim inside, for the lamp burnt badly, and besides, only a small part of the young woman's face could be made out between her veil and her shawls ; still, certain lines about mouth and nose reminded Edward so strongly of his betrothed that he could no longer restrain his curiosity. She seemed to be quite young, and Edward, with the instinct of a true artist, divined a beautiful form under the plain and unbecoming costume, a printed calico and an ordinary hat and veil.

From this girl his eye at once was drawn to two persons who were evidently the girl's companions, and who looked to him very peculiar, a man and a woman. Their

appearance was calculated to excite mistrust. The man was a sturdy, thick-set fellow, dressed in a loud plaid from head to foot, with a crimson cravat, coarse, vulgar hands with an abundance of rings, and a downright wicked face. He seemed to consider himself very elegant and quite as cunning. He admired his rings from time to time, and winked at his wife with a cunning leer. She was an ugly old creature in fashionable clothes, but with a face which made Frank, who was no novice, shudder, and think that it was probably no stranger to any crime that could be committed. Edward, however, paid but little attention to the three passengers, except that gradually—he could not tell how nor why—there came to his mind a conviction that this girl was kept in a kind of captivity or coercion by the two ill-looking persons. She sat silent and sad in her corner, never looking up, while her two companions every now and then, after looking at her, exchanged a few words with each other.

Not a word, however, could he hear till in Berlin, when they got out of the train, the girl seemed to make some resistance. Edward heard as he was going away, how the old woman threatened the girl, and actually thought he understood the man to say, that he could easily knock the fool on her head. His kind heart made him stop a moment and look back. He saw the man seize the girl's arm and drag her along, while the woman walked behind her as if to cut off the retreat. Edward, however, noticed that the girl, as she passed close by him, cast an anxious, beseeching look at him, seeking assistance.

He told himself that evidently some wrong was attempted here and determined to follow the strange company. It was late now, nearly night, and few people in the streets. The way they took led into a remote region, and Edward felt more than once like leaving them to their fate, but for one thing : at a place somewhat lighter

than the narrow streets through which they had so far passed, the girl suddenly stopped and looked around. The man dragged her at once forward, but Edward saw in this act of the girl's, a silent appeal to his chivalry, a ray of hope that he might come to her rescue.

After having followed the remarkable trio some distance, they at last made a halt. They were in a part of Eastern Berlin which was so new that it was not even lighted up yet with gas. Evidently they had reached the end of their journey, but Edward, who had drawn nearer, saw distinctly that the girl strongly objected to entering the house. He heard a tearful, beseeching voice, and a screeching, as he suspected from the toothless mouth of the old witch. In an instant he was in their midst, and asked what was the matter.

"Blows for them that meddle," said a coarse, scornful voice. "Oh, my friend, it takes two where blows are given!"

The girl had, at Edward's question, torn herself loose from the old man, had run up to Edward, and was now clinging to his arm. The big, burly man followed her, pushed the girl back, and seized her, saying:

"The devil may be your friend! I am not! Go your way, or—"

"At the place I come from," said Edward, calmly, "we have a proverb which says, 'A rude answer fits a rude question.'" With these words he drew the girl behind him and dealt the man a blow into the face, that he measured his length on the sidewalk, and the blood came running from his mouth and nose. The woman ran shrieking to the nearest house door and began to batter it with her fists, and to ring the bell furiously.

"Now be quick!" Edward said to the girl, drew her arm through his own and hurried away as fast as he could. After a long course in a part of the city remote

from the scene of the little drama they stopped at last, badly *exhausted and out of breath*. After awhile Edward asked the girl where he should take her now, and under whose roof she would seek shelter. To his great dismay, she told him that she did not know herself. She was a perfect stranger in Berlin, had never seen the city, having neither friend nor relative here, except the ugly old hag and the man in the plaid, whom he had just now stretched out on the ground.

Edward was greatly embarrassed, but the girl's soft, timid voice, her tears and her manifest hopelessness, all combined, filled him with such pity that he took her straight to his own rooms. On the way, however, he did not say a word, but meditated what he was to do with this Heaven-sent maid? The girl followed him in perfect silence, mounted the staircase behind him, and remained standing before his door while he lit the hanging-lamp.

"Well, my dear child," he said at last, "take off your cloak, make yourself comfortable here and let us talk."

Obediently she put down her ugly large cloak, as well as bonnet and veil, and a knit shawl that had kept her neck warm, and Edward now saw, not without great astonishment and no slight embarrassment, a marvelously beautiful woman before him, whose motions seemed to have been taught by the Graces themselves, and whose face bore the imprint of heavenly innocence. In fact her purity had something more than human about it; her eyes looked clear and bright into the world, and only the halo was wanting to reach one of Giotto's virgins. Her dark violet eyes were beaming with pure, childlike love, and her hair, dusted with gold and blonde like Gretchen's, fell in large braids down her shoulders.

Timid and with folded hands, as if craving pardon, she remained standing near the chair on which she had put her things. These hands were not without traces of

hard work, but Edward saw at a glance that they were as beautifully shaped as the whole slender and yet full body.

Edward was bitterly embarrassed. His first thoughts were of Sylvia ; he knew she would never think it proper that a well-educated and betrothed young man should take a strange and fair woman to his rooms. Yet he felt as if he could not be more cruel than the Bedouin of the Desert who dare not refuse hospitality even to his mortal enemy. He forgot the wise words he had meant to speak, and mindful of the long journey and the hurried walk, he went in search of a bottle of Falernian wine, some bread and a dish of figs, and the first pears in the market, and invited the girl to share with him his light refreshments. She followed his directions quite obediently, but not in any lowly style—on the contrary, rather like a king's daughter, who, pursued by cruel fate, trusts the noble knight in whose hands she has fallen. The deep blue eyes observed keenly the polychromes, the sketches and the canvas on the easel, and then returned again, looking bashfully and yet trustingly at the open countenance of the young painter. He filled two shallow drinking vessels, raised his on high, and exclaimed : “To the great gods !” and then poured a few drops on the ground. The girl looked at him with the utmost astonishment, and then a charming smile flitted across her face, showing two little dimples in her rosy, round cheeks. This smile had a wonderful effect on Edward. It was like a ray of the sun. “By Jupiter !” he said to himself, “she is a brighter girl than I should have expected to meet with in the streets of Berlin.”

With a good appetite, but saying few words, the two disposed of their frugal supper. Edward hesitated to ask her any questions which might have appeared unkind, or could have broken the charm. She, on the other hand, hardly ever looked up, and only now and then cast a

glance of doubt and admiration at him. A stranger even could have read in her eyes that she was amazed at finding herself in company with a young man who belonged to a class of which she had probably till now never seen a member.

In the meantime the Falernian seemed to have had some effect on Edward's mind, for suddenly it occurred to him that, as usual, there was a ray of hope also in this dark night of doubt and uncertainty.

"My dear child," he said, pulling out his watch, "this is the hour of ghosts and goblins, but it will soon be over, and then it will be too late to provide a shelter for yourself during the night. There is a chance in the neighborhood for an arrangement. Excuse me a little while. I'll be back as soon as I can."

While speaking purposely in such vague terms, he was thinking of a friend, a painter, who never failed to sit in a favorite restaurant over his cups till late, not in the night, but in the morning. This painter had a lovely and sensible wife, and his rooms were not far off. If this wine-bibbing painter should be too strictly ruled at home to enter upon his views, Edward proposed to spend the night with him, over another bottle or two, so as to defy slander with a good conscience.

He went at once, and for safety's sake locked the front door, lest his landlady should chance to make her way up-stairs and there make surprising discoveries.

The friendly painter was found duly at his post, sitting in his unfailing chair, whence he enlightened a not very attentive audience with his views on the little complications of the East. Edward drew him aside, initiated him in a whisper, so that the other artists might not hear of his plan, and implored his assistance.

"You know my Philistine landlady," he said; "she is an admirable dame. The good woman provides for the

future like the busy ant in the fable, but she has also trained her husband so admirably that he does not dare sneeze without her holding his head during the operation. She also keeps a strict account of my out-goings and in-comings, and if I were to venture to keep a young girl in my studio, she would rouse half the city in wild rebellion. You, on the contrary, have a wife of your own, you have a family, and you can do it without giving offence."

The painter looked thoughtful.

"A devilish bad story," he said. "My Kate is a very sensible woman; you know her. She never makes a row if I return home very near morning, but—if I should bring a pretty girl home into the bargain! It can't be done, dear friend! Try to carry the innocent child back again into the street—she will find somebody to take care of her."

"You are a blockhead," whispered Edward, angrily, "I was going to do you a great favor—to recommend you to Baron Rosen, who wants to have some more frescoes in his large dining-hall—but a man so uncongenial I can never recommend."

"My good man," replied the painter, shaking his head, "you and I will pile up a million of troubles and annoyances on our innocent heads if we do that! I give you my solemn assurance, I would rather carry home one of those nice little boxes which the Fenians try to smuggle on board British men-of-war, than your innocent, beautiful, strange girl of whom nobody can tell where she comes from or where she is going to. Does your baron pay decently?"

"No, but nobly!" exclaimed Edward. "He wants to have partridges, pheasants, grapes, melons, hock and what not in his still life. That is exactly your *forte*; no

one paints as you do the golden sheen in the tall old German glasses. Come, we'll fetch the girl!"

"Well, if it must be!" growled the painter. "Man must make a fool of himself now and then, or he grows old before the time."

After the two gentlemen had started on their remarkable errand, and especially after the painter also had succumbed to the astonishing beauty of the mysterious stranger, enhanced by the pure and chaste expression of her features, which the artist instantly seized upon and fully appreciated, all went on swimmingly. In the painter's house it so happened that there was a vacant room, in which a boarder had been lodged till a few days ago, and this was at once assigned to the girl, so that she could be installed there without rousing anybody else in the house.

"But mind," said the painter very emphatically, "tomorrow morning early I expect you to appear here as a witness of my integrity!" Then the door closed, and Edward prepared to return home.

The thought of this girl disturbed his night's repose. He now recalled the resemblance to Sylvia, which he had not noticed so much in her presence as when he tried accurately to recall her features.

"Strange," he said to himself, "all her ways are different from Sylvia's. She is womanly all over, soft and gentle and winsome, while Sylvia has a certain manful determination and sternness. The resemblance must be purely physical, if my love to Sylvia does not make me see what is not! At all events this girl's Psyche must be strong enough to outweigh her physique, for as long as I sat looking at her, I never once thought of Sylvia!"

He went as early as he thought he might venture, to see his friend. To his surprise he found, after having entered the house with great timidity, and not without

apprehension of a painful scene, a group assembled in the studio which showed only smiling faces.

Before his easel Lehman the painter was sitting at work, with the strange girl as his model, and in the presence of Mrs. Lehman. After a few words of hearty greeting and humorous explanation, he stepped up to the easel and from it looked at the girl whom he had rescued. He was immensely struck again by her charming face, which appeared in daylight so much more richly colored than at night that he was surprised. The image which he had formed of her in his mind paled before the reality. A sweet blush and an imploring glance sent to him, seemed to ask his pardon that she had done something without first having asked his leave, and at the same time gave utterance to a gratitude which went straight to Edward's heart.

She still wore the same costume as last night, without the slightest effort at adornment; her golden hair was arranged in the simplest possible way around her head, which she carried nobly, but even thus, adorned with nothing but the gifts of Nature, Edward thought he had never seen a fairer model for Faust's Gretchen.

"I am sure you call me a man bent upon his advantage," began the painter with an air of triumph.

"Indeed," replied Edward, "it looks as if we had brought you fame and money. I mean the Miss and her amiability."

"I bet," said the painter, "there will be a rush and a fight for this model, for I have never had such beauty on my easel!"

Edward was greatly embarrassed, and followed now the painter's hand, and then the lines which that hand was copying from the girl's lovely face. He could not find a word to open conversation, and hence was quite glad when Mrs. Lehman beckoned him to follow her to

an adjoining room. She had at once made friends with the girl and could tell him much of her life.

The stranger's name was Betty, she said, but no family name, nor had the poor girl ever known any parents. From her earliest infancy she had been in the hands of that woman, who had nursed her and then kept her under the name of Alma Sinclair, which she told her was her mother's name. But the child had her reasons for doubting these statements. She had been sent to school, and had been instructed in subjects which generally fell to the lot of more favored children only. At the same time, she had firmly held on to the few papers she possessed, especially when, after a while, her nurse had begun to lay domestic duties on her and make her perform menial services. Recently this nurse had been in a state of great excitement after receiving a letter, and soon after a man and a woman had come to take her away to Berlin. She had, from the beginning, mistrusted these people, who had always refused to give her the explanation to which she thought she was entitled, and made several efforts to escape. To her nurse she would not return—that was sure—but she wished very much to secure a position as help to an elderly or infirm lady, where she would make every effort to please and give satisfaction.

“It is evident,” said the painter's wife, in conclusion, “that there is some mystery about this child's birth and early childhood.”

“But what can we do to help her?” asked Edward. “Entirely unprotected in this world—what is to become of her? I thought I would consult my betrothed. Sylvia is a very clever girl, and might, perhaps, suggest a remedy. She might procure for her a pleasant situation in the house of one of her great relations.”

The painter's wife smiled.

“There is my dear old Frank all himself again,” she

said ; “ the rash, hot-headed enthusiast, who in all innocence commits the greatest blunders. I thought you had learned a little wisdom, since you are engaged ! ”

“ My dearest Mrs. Lehman, ” replied Edward, “ when I marry I mean to have a wife who is in everything of my opinion. There must not be a chance for the smallest misunderstanding between us, but such candor and trustfulness that either of us can and may say and do what he chooses, and be sure to be approved and assisted by the other. Without that I cannot imagine happiness in wedlock. ”

“ Well then, ” replied his friend, smiling wickedly, “ if you think it wiser so, tell your Sylvia your adventure of last night. I had proposed, for my part, to do my duty to this charming child ; but if you— ”

Edward sat still thoughtfully for some time ; a variety of more or less uncomfortable thoughts crossed his head. Recalling his last conversation with his betrothed in the park, and many similar interviews with her, he came to the conclusion that it would be impractical to make Sylvia his confidante in this very delicate affair. It made him feel so unpleasantly that he almost roughly turned to his wise friend, asking her :

“ Well, and what was it you meant to do ? ”

She then told him, with many details, that her sister’s husband, a minister in Punkinton, had five boys as boarders and pupils, and needed assistance, his wife being unable, alone, to manage so large a household. To him she thought she would send Alma. At the same time, she proposed, with the aid of some kinsmen in that part of the country from which Alma came, to set on foot a careful and discreet inquiry, in order to ascertain, if possible, something about her birth, her parentage and early childhood. This plan seemed to Edward admir-

able, and they returned to the studio to propose it to the girl and to get her consent.

When Edward, however, found himself facing this angelic face and once more looking into those chaste violet eyes, he hesitated a moment to make the proposal to such a delicate being. To bury herself in a wretched little village, to live in a poor, lowly house with five bad boys, and to work in the kitchen, and who knows where, the outlook, he confessed, was not tempting. In fact, he would have thought no place on earth too high for so much grace and beauty. He could not make up his mind to tell her what lot they intended to make hers. He gazed at the sketch on the easel, and although he admitted that the likeness was striking, he was not satisfied, and began to criticise this and that. How eagerly the girl followed his words, apparently drinking them in as if they had been heavenly manna! At last Mrs. Lehman's patience was exhausted; she was far too shrewd not to guess what made Edward hesitate so long, and without ceremony she broke the ice, and told Alma what was intended. To her surprise and delight the girl at once assented, and gratefully entered upon the project. A letter was to be written and forwarded to Punkinton that same day, and hopes were entertained that Alma might, in a few days, be safe under the roof of the worthy pastor. Edward could not remain any longer and took leave. On Alma's face the color changed as she gave him her hand and with hot tears thanked him once more for all he had done for her. He went, feeling as if in a dream, and thinking of nothing but of the poor abandoned orphan—if orphan she was.

Passing by a certain store, the owner of which he knew, a happy thought occurred to him. He remembered how much he and all who saw the poor girl the first time, had been struck by the extreme poverty of her costume. He

entered, therefore, and with the aid of the lady, his friend, selected all that was most urgently needed to make up a very modest outfit for the child. In making his purchases he could not but feel all the time as if he were providing for one who was to be his own. He could hardly be roused from his reveries, and finally left the choice entirely to the good taste and sound judgment of the presiding genius.

At last all was gotten, he paid the bill, ordered the purchase to be sent to his friend's house, and returned home, firmly resolved never to put his foot again in the painter's studio, and not to think of Alma any more. But as he sat down before a blank sheet of paper, his pencil suddenly began to work independently, and instead of the perspective of a palatial residence, for which the paper had been prepared, there appeared a female figure in Grecian costume. Edward threw the sheet indignantly aside, when he noticed what a striking likeness it bore to the fair orphan girl Alma.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE ROOTS OF THE UPAS TREE.

Baron Simon Liondell celebrated his seventieth birthday. He had not driven into town to-day to his counting-room, but spent the morning at his villa in order to escape the host of people who would come to present their congratulations. In town a book was laid out in which the visitors entered their names, and the oldest clerk had received seventy thousand dollars to distribute in wise discretion among benevolent institutions and the

poor of the city. Every visitor, moreover, who came to congratulate and chose to avail himself of the pretext to present a petition for alms, was to receive a small sum of money.

“God has blessed me abundantly,” the old man said to himself as he wrote the cheque for this sum, and gratefully thought of the abundance he possessed, “and people shall see that Simon Liondell remembers his poor brethren.”

He thought of the God of Abraham, of Jacob and of Isaac, the great Jehovah, who had led his people into a land flowing with milk and honey.

Old Simon was sitting in his library in the villa like an old owl in a gilt cage. The room was, of course, like the whole edifice, a model of wealth and elegance, but he himself was not fair to look at. The room was in the corner of the house, and had six walls in black marble, the whole forming a kind of pavilion. Four of the walls were covered with splendid frescoes, the fifth had a door in a frame of yellow marble, and the sixth an enormous window of but one gigantic pane of glass. On the dividing spaces between the frescoes hung four pictures of great value, all of them views of the most beautiful parts of God's earth. One represented the Gulf of Naples, a second Stockholm, the third showed the Golden Horn and the last the Memnon Image. These pictures indemnified the old banker for his enforced residence at one place ; for he did not like traveling, especially not on railways, where so many accidents were continually happening, and still less on water, which he hated with the hereditary horror of his race. Whenever voyages were mentioned, the old man was fond of quoting Porcius Cato, who said that there were only three things for which he felt repentance : one if he had ever told a woman what he wished to be kept secret—another, if he had spent a day

in idleness—and the third having gone by water to a place which he might have reached by land. In spite of all this splendor, however, the old baron did not feel comfortable in this room, nor in the villa itself. He was a most industrious man of business, and only felt really at home within the four walls of his counting-room, between the many telephones which connected him with all the world, and before the huge writing-table that was covered with innumerable papers; here in this dark old room, where even in the day-time several lights were always kept burning,—here was his true and only home. Here his small bright eyes flashed with energy and cunning calculations, here as he sent and received dispatches from all parts of the earth, and rolled his millions to and fro, here he felt the full power of his immense influence on the affairs of the world.

But to-day the small, round form of the old man sat between Vesuvius and Memnon, in an arm-chair specially devised and made for him, his feet resting on an immensely costly old Persian prayer-rug, while his small, bloodless hand drummed a march on the superb black ebony table, and he was conversing with his son, who brought him surprising news.

Amadeus was reporting to him the last proceedings in court against the Turkish interpreter who had threatened the life of the great artist, Chessa Molini, for this trial was of special import for the house of Liondell,

The researches which Amadeus had set on foot had resulted in the remarkable discovery that the famous singer was probably a Liondell by birth—the daughter of the baron's older and only brother. The Turk was, according to his own statement, a prince of an Arab tribe, called Quïloa, and his own name was Said Medgid. In a war against the slave-dealers on the eastern coast of Africa, his father, coming from Zanzibar, had too rashly

pursued some Portuguese merchants, and in the heat of the pursuit lost his little daughter. Later, a report had reached him that the child had been carried to Cuba and sold there; thereupon he had sent his son, the interpreter, to the island to discover her, if possible, and to rescue her. The young man had taken passage on board a Spanish vessel, accompanied by thirty slaves of his own, and in company of five hundred blacks who were to be sold in Cuba. Landing in Havana, he had been accosted by an agent who had come down to the ship to look at the slaves and to assist in selling them to Cuban planters. This man had invited the prince to come, with his whole retinue, and take up his abode with the agent until his sister could be found. But no sooner had the Arabs arrived at the hacienda of this imposter, which was on all sides surrounded by high walls, than all of them were seized, stripped of their clothes and weapons, and branded with his initials B. L., which were ever after to mark them as his property.

When the young baron had come to this point in his narration, he had paused, deeply moved, and the old man sighed deeply, grieving at the wickedness of his brother. Prince Said Medgid, the story went on, had worn on his person, under his clothes, a chain consisting of alternate corals and balls of solid gold, which he considered an amulet. As they pulled off his silken underwear to brand him, this chain had attracted the attention of a ten-year-old daughter of the agent, Benjamin Liondell, who sprang up and tore the chain from his neck. Then, in a burst of fury, he had struck down one of his guards, but was instantly overpowered, fettered and whipped. Then the ten-year-old girl, with precocious ferocity, had with her own hands pressed the red-hot branding iron upon the bare breast of the Arab prince. This girl, Said Medgid maintained, became afterwards and is now

the celebrated artist, Chessa Molini. The chain, unique in the world, had attracted his attention at the supper at the Alliance Club, and he had at once recognized the features of the girl who had so cruelly marked him for life.

Years ago Baron Simon had been informed that his brother Benjamin, with his whole family, had been massacred in one of the frequent revolts of slaves in that ill-fated island. Now it became evident that the betrayal of this Arab prince had given the occasion for this rising. He, to avenge himself, had skillfully formed a widespread conspiracy, the effect of which had been the destruction of the agent's hacienda by fire and the murder of the whole family. Only the brutal child with the necklace, Said Medgid added, had escaped in an almost miraculous manner, probably by the secret influence of the amulet.

When the young man had reached this point in his narration, he was interrupted by the entrance of a servant in richly gold-laced livery, who announced His Excellency the Russian Ambassador, Prince Tshitshatsheff.

The banker rose and went to meet the Prince. He had an ambling walk, for he suffered of gout, and had, moreover, the consciousness that a man such as he was could walk in any way that was most convenient to him. The folding-doors of the large hall which adjoined the banker's library, were torn open, and in the centre of this apartment, shining with gold, the smiling Shemite and the cunning Tartar met in affectionate embrace.

The Russian Ambassador was a small man, with the face of a woman a hundred years old. It was crossed and recrossed by a thousand small wrinkles of bluish pallor, entirely beardless, and almost without lips, with deep-sunk cheeks. But it received its light from two jet black brilliant eyes, of incredible size, and a strange look-

ing cunning, which made the impression as if the whole face was eyes. He was in evening costume, and wore, among countless stars and crosses, an immense portrait of the Czar set in diamonds of amazing size.

With a familiarity which elicited from the prince's eyes a flash of angry repugnance, the banker patted him on his back, took him under his arm, led him with many flattering phrases into the library, and there pressed him into a wide arm-chair facing the Golden Horn. Then the prince presented to him a handsome young man, Chamberlain of His Majesty, Prince Amurinski, and took from his hands a red morocco case.

"My dear baron," he said, opening the case, "His Majesty, my gracious Master, has ordered me to hand you this star and this ribbon, together with the expression of his most gracious good wishes."

With these words he hung upon the neck of the old man, who continually bowed, a broad, fiery red ribbon, and fastened a star of the size of a small saucer on his left breast. Then the two ugly old men shook hands with each other most cordially, and looked at each other with much meaning in their deep, cunning eyes. Both were alike experienced and clever, handsomely decorated, and eager to overreach each other. The young baron and Prince Amurinski were silent witnesses of this ceremony.

The minister was the first to speak, and began, after a few complimentary phrases, to discuss the Russian finances, which the prince tried to represent as most prosperous.

"However," he said, interrupting himself, "I must not forget that you are, of course, much better acquainted with our finances than we are. You see, my dear baron, how very practical these measures are, and how easy it will therefore be to you, no doubt, to place the new loan

for five hundred millions rubles, which will be needed in the course of the year, and which you and the Baron Steiglitz together, will, I presume, emit as usual."

The banker rose. "Come in," he said, "come in!" seizing the great man by the arm again. "Your Excellency will not disdain, I hope, a glass of Madeira. It is genuine, and there is little enough of it grown on the islands, but I and the Queen of England, we get some little."

The prince allowed himself to be dragged up from his chair and through the reception-room into a third gorgeously adorned hall, where a table was set. Covered silver dishes with alcohol lamps kept the dishes hot, and rich perfumes overcame the odor of eatables. The whole room was wainscoted with cedar-wood, and from the ceiling hung gold and silver fruit, apparently grown on beautifully-wrought garlands. The servants pushed four heavy, luxuriously-padded chairs to the table, and they took their seats to enjoy their breakfast.

"You will see," said the banker, "that I have already prepared everything for the loan. It will be taken almost entirely here in Germany. I have had written articles in all the best European newspapers, explaining the true condition of Russia, and you will see the result."

The prince nodded courteously, played with the caviar and his gold-washed spoons, drank three drops of Madeira from a Venetian glass of priceless value, and then entered upon a discussion of the conditions under which he would undertake to place the loan. The negotiations did not proceed as promptly as had been hoped. The old banker was not satisfied with material advantages, although he calculated that the syndicate which might take and place the loan, might earn half a million dollars in the transaction, one-fourth of which would fall into his safe, but he demanded besides that the Russian

Government should bring a pressure to bear upon Roumania, to make an end to the persecution of the Jews in that country.

“Whilst all over Europe that toleration prevails which is the best guarantee for a good condition of business generally, there in a corner of Europe, a rude, uncivilized population continues to wage open war against harmless, innocent citizens, simply because they have another faith. This may bring about deplorable conflicts, and threaten the continuance of peace! The other great powers have so far refused to acknowledge the admission of Roumania, merely on this account. Russia cannot secure her credit if she permits such horrors under her own guns, and if she herself takes measures in evident hostility!”

The prince closed the upper half of his eyes, as if he wished to close the windows through which his thoughts might be seen, and said: “Pardon me, dear baron, but I fear you have been misinformed in this case. The poor Roumanians can hardly defend themselves against the Jews, who fall upon the land like grasshoppers. These clever, cunning dealers, get hold of the whole soil, and the Diet looks in vain for measures by which they might be kept outside, because these foreign dealers are pernicious.”

At this moment the gray-haired old servant announced His Excellency the Minister of Finances. The Ambassador rose.

“You are engaged, I see,” he said. “Consider my offer.”

“Oh, I pray! your Excellency!” said the baron, holding his arm, “it is nobody—only the Minister of Finances. Your Excellency has not even finished your glass of wine. Show His Excellency in!” he said to the servant.

A rosy, blooming gentleman appeared in the door, and was most cordially welcomed by the old baron.

“It gives me very particular pleasure,” he said, “my dear Baron Liondell, to write my hearty congratulations, with those of His Majesty, who herewith appoints you Privy Councilor, and at the same time, in token of his appreciation of your signal merit, sends you this external evidence.” With these words he handed the old gentleman a parchment, and with his own hands fastened a broad, yellow ribbon with a diamond star around his neck. “And I have reason to believe that this decoration will not be the only one to keep the high Russian order company, which I see there, for my carriage preceded only by a few yards that of the Portuguese Minister.”

“Frederick,” said the vain old man to the servant, “tell the valet to send me a set of my orders—the large one. Oh! if my Rebecca only could have lived to see this moment!” he sighed, stepping before an immense silver-framed mirror and admiring himself. “Thank you, my dear Müller, thank you,” he said to the minister; “and also for your admirable speech yesterday in the Diet! You spoke as I would have done had I been there, from my very heart! When will people get tired blaming Government and demanding another method of managing our finances? But I am not afraid. As long as we have men like my friend Müller, and our good friend Schmidt at the rudder, affairs must prosper. Are not our finances most prosperous?”

“His excellency, the Minister of Finances, certainly looks prosperous and blooming,” said the Russian.

“That reminds me of a little story,” said the banker. “His Excellency was going home after having dined here, and the dinner, as I must confess, had been a pretty good one—”

“Your dinners are always good,” laughed the minis-

ter. "I must confess I had done, that evening of which you speak, not my duty only, but perhaps a little more. I was not free from apprehension, I know. My physician had whispered a fatal word in my ear—apoplexy! But that red partridge stew was—"

"Oh, well! As I said, my friend here was going home after this gracious appreciation of my cook, when at a corner of Unter den Linden the carriage was stopped. There was a jam. Profiting by the opportunity, a ragged beggar steps up and asks for alms, saying, 'I am dying of hunger!' 'And you complain, rascal?' said the Excellency here, 'I only wish I were in your place, and could hunger!' "

"His Excellency, Count Gorres Nuevas, the Portuguese minister."

He also brought a token of his master's appreciation of the remarkable talents of old Liondell, and after him came an almost endless number of eminent men from his own country and from foreign countries. One elegant carriage after another drove up and into the beautiful portico of the villa, resting on richly adorned marble columns, and soon an active, busy crowd of ladies and gentlemen filled the rooms, surging from one to the other as this or that celebrity was recognized in one or the other apartment. The old baron himself, his whole breast covered with stars and crosses, literally dazzling by their splendid array of diamonds, was waddling up and down, spending here a kind word and there a weighty, business hint, or setting a whole crowd a-laughing by a witticism, which, coming from any other man, would never have been noticed.

But his heart was in the kitchen.

He had ordered for to-day—he dined at the early hour of six—a dinner of fifty persons, among whom were perhaps a dozen elderly men who were considered the great-

est gourmets of the city. Among these was a famous physician, who had written a great work on Dyspepsia, at the same time rendering a signal service to mankind by the invention of a new and incomparable mayonnaise; also a prince of the church, very near to the person of His Holiness, who had brought the secret of a salad made with the white of egg and Lucca oil, to Berlin, and even the Member of the Imperial Diet, Comet, the banker's connection of marriage, with whom he carried on a perpetual feud on the subject of the precise moment when a baron of beef ought to appear on the table. Prince Lignac also was present, and other wise and solid men, who had come to the conclusion that nothing in this restless, ever-changing world was worth living for, except what we eat and drink.

To give these men a fit dinner was to-day the great question for the good old gentleman, and he had spent hours with his first artist in the kitchen, discussing the *menu*, and preparing one or two surprises even for the most experienced palates. Among these was a dish of bears' paws, which he had ordered from St. Petersburg. These paws were to be wrapped in skins and thus roasted between hot stones, without any condiment whatever, and the baron was intensely anxious to see the impression they would make upon the Cardinal, who had once asserted that they were the noblest dish on earth, but unfortunately never cooked fit to be eaten except in St. Petersburg. The baron was anxious, for none of his cooks had ever attempted the dish, and even his first *cordobleu*, who shrank from no difficulty, had lain awake all night reflecting on this costly and as yet unknown dish. But the old baron suffered yet from another source. He fancied he perceived a faint odor coming from the kitchen. This notion—for it was nothing more—had made a lodgment in his mind, until it had actually become a fixed

idea. It had caused him more annoyance and real grief than the loss of millions. In reality not the smallest odor was perceptible in the reception-rooms—in fact it was impossible from the great distance that lay between them and the kitchen—but the baron took it into his head that it was so and was unhappy. He was not a man whom imagination controlled; on the contrary, a practical man, every inch of him. Nevertheless, that fancy which plays so many tricks on us mortal dwellers on earth, now and then got hold of him also. He remembered that some of his cooks from the south of France could not abandon the habit of perfuming nearly every dish of their make with a suspicion of garlic or onion, and now the poor old man's nose distinctly perceived the rich, luscious odor in his private apartments!

He turned to his son and whispered into his ear: "Do you smell it, Amadeus?"

The baron shrugged his shoulders. He knew his father's idiosyncrasy. "I beseech you, father, be calm! The kitchen is half a mile off!"

"And yet I smell it!" replied the father.

Full of mistrust he walked straight up to President Comet, whose benevolent face and imposing figure was just then visible in the open door.

"All right! All right!" he replied to the good wishes and blessings of the great financier and statesman, "that is all very well, but tell me, quite honestly and candidly, if you, a member of the Imperial Diet, have not forgotten how that is done. Do you perceive an odor from the kitchen here?"

He drew his kinsman aside, as he asked this question, and took no notice of his niece Rachel, who was almost dissolving in joy and humble delight at the wealth and high position of the rich uncle. Nor did he mind Sylvia, who, elegant and joyous as became the occasion, was

standing behind her mother and waiting for her turn to offer congratulations.

The cunning old parliamentarian, thus questioned by the banker, thought it might be wholesome for the Nabob, on a day on which fortune was showering all her richest gifts upon him, to taste a little bitterness. He looked with envy at the long rows of splendid stars on the old man's breast, and thought what a scandal it was that old money-Jews should be thus decorated, while really deserving men like himself were forgotten and forsaken. At the same time he remembered that the old man had several times spoken of building himself a new house nearer to town; in that case he hoped to be able to secure the architectural plans, etc., for his son-in-law to come, as Sylvia would love him.

"If I am to be quite frank," he said, "I must indeed confess—confess—that something here reminds me of a favorite dish, which I learnt to know and to prize highly in Pau—I mean—"

"Never mind!" broke in the baron.

"Permit me," continued Comet, holding on to one of the crosses on the little man's breast, "it may interest you. An old French officer once showed me the true preparation of endive salad. You know, it requires first of all, a fat capon—"

He paused, for the banker looked furious, and his face assumed a deeper red. After a while he calmly continued:

"I have always thought the plan of your house labored under one serious defect. The kitchen is evidently so situated that the natural direction of the winds is in the direction from it to your State apartments. Our architects have not yet learnt to attend to such matters as carefully as ought to be done. I have learnt that from my future son-in-law, an excellent architect, who com-

bines the most genial insight with the most thorough scientific culture."

"Send him to me one of these days," said the old baron, "I want to discuss that with him."

Now at last he found leisure to speak to the ladies Comet, and accepted their congratulations with much acidity in his face. He was anxious to be left alone. These visits fatigued him, and he had thoughts that seriously troubled him. Above all, he was anxious to hear the conclusion of the story which his son had begun; the melancholy fate of his nearest relatives distressed him greatly, and although he had known of course, that they had died in Cuba, he was now exceedingly anxious to hear something of his only surviving niece.

These thoughts returned with renewed force when he could at last bid farewell to most of the guests; he shortened the conversation with others, and at last curtly dismissed some whose only excuse for their presence was a very remote relationship. Then he sent for the young baron, whom he had not seen for an hour or more. To his surprise he learnt that he had driven out. Angrily he pushed a heap of letters and official documents from the table and took up the last reports from 'Change at London, simply in order to have at last something solid in his hands.

CHAPTER XI.

ABROAD.

The joys and cares of the morning, the conversation with so many and so varied men had fatigued him ; and long before he had begun to appreciate the delicate pulse of the two great 'Changes of Paris and London, his head had sunk on his breast among all the enameled beasts and birds there, and his eyes closed. Present things vanished ; he felt himself a baby led by a mysterious charm which the old, old man could not make out ; now it was a ribbon, and he tried his utmost to see what its color was and to which of his many orders it belonged. He saw himself next surrounded by blacks, and was unspeakably distressed that he possessed no cowries, not a pitiful knife, nothing to purchase his life. These brutal creatures became more and more beastly, until at last they determined to cut him up and make "long pig" of him. The anxiety grew and he suffered agonies, until at last the charm broke ; the pain reached a point at which he could bear it no longer, and he awoke. Before him stood his son, who had laid his hand on his shoulder to wake him.

"Oh, my son Amadeus, my soul is in sadness, because of my brother Benjamin !" said the old man, still half under the dominion of sleep.

The eyes of the son shone with a dismal fire, but he said nothing.

"Tell me, Amadeus, what else you know of my brother's child. I will take charge of her and be a father to her !"

"That would be nice, indeed," said the son. "I should

think we had enough baggage of that kind already in the house !”

“Amadeus ! what say you !” exclaimed the old man, terrified.

“This singer can do us no good. Who knows where she has been, or not been, since she ran away from Cuba ? We would become the laughing stock of the world if we were to pick up that woman and introduce her as our ‘new cousin.’ We shall have enough to do to keep that scandalous affair at the club out of the newspapers. I have, at all events, sent round to the editors whom we know, asking them not to mention the unlucky affair.”

“Amadeus, you are clever, you are too clever,” said the father. “But remember, ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom !’ Shall I deny my own brother’s seed ?”

“I pray, dear father, do not talk in that antediluvian way. We are surely too enlightened in our day to let such maxims guide us in life. The commands of prudence and the divine laws of olden times are identical. It is pretty much the same thing, but I do not like to hear you speak in such a very old-fashioned way.”

“But Amadeus, we are surely bound to assist our kith and kin. Our people are scattered all over the earth, and we must hold together, stand up one for all, and all for one, if we do not mean to be trod under foot by the Christians, and here, in our own family, where we deal with flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood—we must keep together !”

“When it is profitable—yes ! But here it is of no use. The Chessa cannot be benefited by our calling her cousin. She is one of the greatest artists alive and does a brilliant business. She does not need us. But we, we belong to the Upper Ten, we are aristocrats, and for us the connection with a Spanish singer of doubtful fame is

very compromising—especially since she lies under the suspicion of having stolen a necklace! If we mean to give up our relations to the first in the land, in order to play the affectionate kinsmen to this whole crowd of the children of Korah—why in the name of common sense did I ever take the trouble of having myself baptized?”

“Amadeus, Amadeus, you are clever! Too, too clever, I tell you, my son. But pride is leading you astray and pride goes before the fall. We have not become rich by pride. I do not like it that you go to these strange people, and ride their wild horses, and play with them at baccarat in the club, and sit in high places at the opera, and applaud after you have looked round to see if the others applaud too! That is not a business at which you can make money. That is a business which can only bring you difficulties with these reckless, young soldiers who do not mind firing at each other in a duel. You are my only son—my only child! Let these great people come to you! You can do it. Don't they come to me? They need us; we do not need them. They are not necessary to us; they have to come to us if they want anything. Look at all my orders and stars, my jewels and my diamonds—did I go to get them? No, they came and brought them to me. Did I go to that haughty Count Henning and beg him to give me his fair daughter Hyacinth as a daughter-in-law? Or did the proud old nobleman bring her to me on a silver waiter when he found out that you liked the maiden?”

The young baron started. The expression of his face grew darker and fiercer, and he walked up and down in the room in a state of great excitement.

“That is it,” he said, vehemently, adding force to his words by violent gestures, “that is what annoys me, that we, with all our money, cannot see things and do things

as these aristocrats. I cannot bear it that they look upon us as parvenus. I want to show these haughty princes, counts and barons that I am just as good as they are, that I fit into their distinguished circles as well as they do, that I am at home in all their knightly usages as well as any of them. For I believe I am, and in my innermost heart, in all my likings and dislikings, ever have been an aristocrat. I have ever liked to fight, to dance, to ride, to develop those tendencies towards music, painting, sculpture and all the fine arts. I am a born aristocrat !”

“Yes, my Amadeus, you are !”

“And yet,” continued the son, “and yet there is a certain something there which I cannot define, but which I feel is there. I noticed it especially among the people whom I met in London at Sir Moses Montifiore’s house. There I never saw a shadow interfering between the Englishmen and ourselves, and yet I met the very best people there.”

“Sir Moses is a Portuguese Jew,” said the old man in a tone of deep veneration.

“And we are Polish Jews,” replied the son, bitterly. “Is not that what you were going to say, father? But I maintain we are no Jews at all, and it is infamous to go on talking of any difference between Jews and Christians and Mohammedans in our days of toleration, instead of taking man as he is, as Nature has made him.”

“And as he has or has not, Amadeus ! You are clever, my son. You are too clever. You are a cavalier, but you do not mind what is most important. You see, Amadeus, all that the Lord has at any time promised our fathers, the patriarchs, is contained in the one small word, Money ! If you say money, you say all things, Amadeus.

“Houses and fields, parks and gardens, costly carriages and high-bred horses, paintings and statues, male singers

and dancers, and female dancers and singers, titles, crosses and stars, grand ladies and fair maidens—all that heart can wish for, and a great deal more—all this is in that one little word—Money! And when I, as they call me, Simon Baron Liondell, take my pen and write on a bit of paper this name of mine, and a cipher with six zeros—then I can cover with my poor old trembling hand all I have mentioned, castles and parks, horses and dogs, great lords and fair women—all and everything!”

The young man threw himself on a lounge, folded his hands behind the back of his head, clenched his teeth, and looked mutely at the exquisite ceiling. He was very unhappy. He had just been to see his betrothed, and the interview had not been pleasant.

When in the forenoon the old baron's villa could hardly contain the multitude that came humbly to congratulate the millionaire, he had been every minute expecting to see his lady-love and her family enter also, but this one family came not! He began to be troubled by their absence for he had devised a nice little jest to hand her a set of rubies of rare beauty in a specially delicate manner—and now she did not come! At last, half anxious and half angry he had ordered his carriage, and after throwing the rubies into a dark corner of his drawer he had gone to see the Countess Hyacinth. His horses were fast and the coachman let them have the reins; nevertheless he urged him to drive faster and faster, and thus, in the course of a few minutes his coupé had dashed up before Count Henning's house. He jumped out, ran up the steps, pushed aside the servant who was going to announce him, and rushed into the reception room. He found his betrothed with reddened eyes from recent weeping, standing at the window, and near her a Captain of Cavalry, Count Victor Eyry.

This Count Eyry was an old friend of the young

Countess Hyacinth, as the young baron knew very well, having found him at this house frequently before, but it pained him rather to see him here just on this day, and the countess evidently moved to tears—by what? The two young men very naturally eyed each other with no friendly looks, the captain always assuming a peculiarly stern manner, when he met the lucky man to whom the fair countess was betrothed. His towering, broad-shouldered form, his strongly-marked warrior's face and his unbending, manly beauty gave him a likeness to a bronze statue that has just stepped down from its pedestal. The last time the young men had met, at the Alliance Club, when the captain had spoken to his cousin, Prince Lignac, he had hardly bestowed more than an icy look upon the young baron, which still rankled in the young man's bosom. To-day also, when he saw him approach his betrothed, he bowed ceremoniously and coldly, and then took leave of the beautiful countess.

Liondell looked at her, looked at the young officer, and felt a dagger piercing his heart, for there was no denying it: the two handsome beings evidently belonged to the same race, the same social rank, the same high grade of culture—they were made of the same dough and must have the same sensations, the same convictions.

The countess was tall and slender—she measured perhaps two inches more than her betrothed. Her complexion was dazzling fair, her eyes the true forget-me-not color so rarely met with, and her hair the richest gold, as brilliant as the wheat in August. In her whole male kith and kin there was not a man who had not borne arms, or meant to do so. They all served their one great master on earth, the monarch, and not one of them had ever lived to make money. As the young man saw these two stately forms side by side, he felt with unspeakable bitterness that they and he had not one drop

of blood in common. This was painful, for he loved the Countess Hyacinth with his whole heart. For a moment his imagination carried him to the yellow sand and the burning sky of the east—he saw the Scot, the warrior in arms sitting by the pure, bubbling spring under the lofty palm tree, eating his coarse, rich food, he heard the white-robed Emir, while playing, as it seemed, with his clean, dainty dates, ironically give utterance to his horror of the unclean animal—and for a moment he felt the haughty contempt of the son of the East, the proud scion of the oldest race on earth, for the swine-eating giaour. He recalled Prince Lignac's contemptuous praise of his high descent from the Princess of Judah—but it was but a moment that the blood and the pride of his ancestors asserted their power in him. The next moment the force of habit resumed its sway and he once more bent under the yoke which his father's millions and his own vanity had imposed upon him.

The young countess had on her side suffered a like painful sensation when her betrothed entered so suddenly, and she tried to detain the officer by one or two trifling questions, so as to diminish the unpleasant abruptness of his departure. She asked him if he had seen Prince Lignac that morning?

He said yes. The prince had shown them a marvelously beautiful horse in the riding-school of their regiment. "If I am not mistaken," he added in obedience to a sign of the countess, turning to Liondell, "the prince told me you had some idea of buying the animal, but that he was too fiery for you. I mean his black horse."

"I do not think the horse is too fiery for me," replied Liondell, quickly. "Suppose, dear Hyacinth, we take a ride to-morrow, and if the count will make one of our



HE FOUND HIS BETROTHED STANDING AT THE WINDOW WEEPING.—See Page 126.

party, I will try to show him that no horse is easily too lively for me."

"I'll do so with pleasure," replied the captain. "At what hour do you command our presence, countess?"

"When can you send the horses, Amadeus?" asked Hyacinth, uttering the name of Amadeus with visible hesitation.

"I am entirely at your service, my dear," said he.

"Well then, let it be at three," she said, "and we can be back in time for dinner!"

"You have been weeping, dearest Hyacinth?" asked the baron, when the officer had left them alone.

"Do not let us speak of it," she said. "There are many trifles in life that easily cause a woman's tears to spring, while they are not worth being mentioned in a man's hearing."

"But it looks as if the count's ears were an exception," thought the young man, but he only thought it, and expressed his surprise that not a member of the family had appeared at his father's house to-day, on his birthday. He said this had caused him some concern and made him come to inquire.

The answer was, that the young countess had been on the point of starting with her old father, when visitors had appeared to whom they could not deny themselves. She was afraid it might be too late now, as the old baron's early dinner hour, six o'clock, was near at hand. Her congratulations, she hoped, would not come too late then. The young lover was not quite reassured by this lame explanation, especially as he thought he noticed a certain excitement in the young countess's manner that he could not easily explain.

If the young lady had been disposed to tell her lover accurately what had happened, and what had really kept

her from paying the proposed visit at the banker's house, he would have been still less content.

It was really so that Count Henning and his fair daughter Hyacinth, had been about to step into their carriage for the intended visit, when a visitor had come at the critical moment and kept them at home. This was Count Eyry, who had important business to contract with her father, and kept both her and her father afterwards in close conversation.

The two young people could never meet without a secret tremor and a sweet longing in their hearts. For once upon a time they had hoped to become man and wife—till fate decided differently. In the Eyry family as in that of the Hennings the unfailing devotion to the Monarch, which made every male member serve him in the army or in the civil service, had gradually reduced their originally large possessions, nor had they ever chosen to marry money. The family Eyry were thus not exactly poor, but the young man found it by no means an easy task to make his modest allowance suffice for his wants, and his father still owned a castle with a fine estate in a ring-fence—but it was heavily mortgaged. He had been in the diplomatic service, and generally valued the honor of his country more highly than his own. Now he was old and retired, living alone with his daughter, spending, for her sake, a few winter months in the capital, and residing the rest of the year in his secluded mountain castle. This house of his, and a magnificent oak forest which surrounded it on all sides, were his last pride. He could trace his family up to the thirteenth century, and pointed with just pride to the fact that not one of his race had lived elsewhere. This soil, these stones, these ivy-covered towers, he could not think of alienating, and when times became hard and the claims of his creditors so urgent that the poor old man at last

saw no other rescue open—he preferred to sacrifice the purity of his race and the happiness of his daughter to the loss of the old ruins.

At one of the great balls given by the count to the residents at the capital and distinguished visitors from abroad, Baron Liondell had fallen desperately in love with the blonde German maiden. He made no concealment of his passion, and her father, who saw in this event the direct interposition of Providence, gave his consent. It surely did look as if fate had taken pity on the old race, when it was his greatest creditor, who held the largest mortgage on his estate, who humbly petitioned for his daughter's hand.

Hyacinth, on her part, consented, though with bleeding heart. She also was attached to the old castle with its hoary legends, its heroic defences, its terrible dungeons and most romantic legends. She resolved, with a brave heart, to prove herself a worthy daughter of the family, and although tears enough were shed in private, the world saw little of her heroic courage. Father and daughter supported each other. Lover and beloved tried to do the same.

“Let us forget, Victor!” she had said.

She found it hard to utter these words, but she did it. He found it hard patiently to listen to them, but he also conquered and remained silent.

“We must forget, Victor,” she continued; “dreams are unwholesome. Let us henceforth be brother and sister! We owe that much to the family, to ourselves, and to my future husband. He is an honorable man, and I shall do my duty conscientiously. It was not to be.”

She bowed her head and shed scalding tears that fell into her lap unnoticed. He bit his mustache and his brow darkened like midnight. He promised to obey, but in his heart he swore it should not be as she said it

was to be. Young Liondell knew nothing of this scene, nor of any other. But his heart told him what must be going on in the heart of his betrothed. He felt it and was generous enough to appreciate her noble character.

His father had in the meantime returned to the financial reports as they were lying on his table before him, and was just calculating how he could make half a million marks by simply keeping an official notice back an hour or so, when his son abruptly demanded to know the amount of mortgages resting on the estate of the Eyry.

“Seven hundred and sixty-five thousand, six hundred and seventy-two marks is my mortgage; the next largest—”

“Oh, never mind, papa,” said the young man, taken aback by the almost appalling minuteness of his father’s knowledge. “I wish he owed you nothing.”

The old man pushed the papers away from him, and looked at his son in amazement.

“Why do you say that, Amadeus? Do you think the man is not safe?”

“Dear father,” said the young man, sighing, “I wished he owed you nothing because then the family would not be dependent on me.”

“And if they were not dependent on you, how would you get your fair bride, my son Amadeus?”

No answer came.

“What is the matter with you, my son, oh, my son?” asked the old baron, anxiously. “Are you dissatisfied? What ails you, my son?”

No answer came yet.

“You would not acknowledge my brother’s child, your cousin, and now you are talking curiously about the Hennings. Have those proud people done aught to offend you, my son? I tell you, my Amadeus, if these

haughty Hennings have done anything to hurt your feelings, I tell you I will show you my power! I did not see the count and his daughter here to-day all the time I was in the reception-room. Could it be that they were not here at all? I tell you, my Amadeus, if they have offended you, they shall apologize for it, or their ancestral castle, which I verily believe they love better than their own flesh and blood, shall come down till not one stone shall rest upon the other, and I shall sow turnips on the spot where their cradles used to stand."

The young man jumped up and once more walked rapidly up and down in the spacious apartment.

"I pray you, father, let us drop the subject. The Hennings were not here, that is true, and I went there to inquire fearing Hyacinth might be sick. They were prevented by visitors whom they could not send away, and will congratulate you at dinner. I am busy with other thoughts in which you take no interest. You do not know, father, how you shock me with your theory that everything on God's earth can be bought for money."

"But, Amadeus, the man who has money—I mean who has money enough, can buy everything—that is so."

"Do you really think so?"

"Amadeus, I tell you, in all my life I have never yet seen the thing that cannot be had for money. Did you ever see any such thing?"

"Yes, indeed, father, and it is always the best. What is the use of all my money if I cannot feel myself at home among all these aristocratic people with whom we exchange visits? Can I offer them money that they may look upon me as a Brandenburg banker, a nobleman of their own race? That they may think me their equal? No! Money cannot do that! Money makes them treat me civilly, invite me, accept my invitations,

come and kill my game, drive in my carriages, ride my horses, and in like manner offer me the use of theirs—but all my money will not break down that invisible parting wall, which, firm like the diamond mountains in the fairy tales, stands between them and myself. But I want to be a cavalier like them, a well-bred gentleman, a man of courtesy and devotion to the fair sex, and not the modern Midas, whose touch changes everything into gold, even the warm, pulsating heart of the living, breathing man.”

“You are young, my son Amadeus, and the young eyes see it so. I know the world longer than you do, my son. That is all very nice and pretty, that riding and driving, and those noble manners and high-bred ways, but it is all humbug, and money is their god just as everybody in the world worships money. As you grow older, you will see more clearly, that nothing on earth has any real, tangible value, but money—the fear of the Lord, of course, always excepted. Amadeus, I beseech you, remember you are my only son; be content with what God has given you—do not hanker after things that have no intrinsic value; profit by the advantages Providence has bestowed upon you at your birth already and strive not after visionary things! Let these aristocrats wait on you—but do not go and wait on them.”

The young baron made no reply, but said merely that it was time to dress for dinner, and went away. All that his father had said only convinced him more strongly that the young countess did not really love him, but only wanted his money. He thought for a moment of breaking off the engagement, but the great love he bore the beautiful woman with the real forget-me-not eyes, made that impossible. Then he thought of tearing the mortgage parchments into pieces, to hand these to the count, and thus to free him of all obligations. But he saw at

once that this was a childish idea, which did not deserve consideration. Then again he delighted in the thought that his betrothed was a great, a nation's beauty, the scion of a noble family, and that everybody envied him the conquest.

On all sides he heard only voices of admiration, of jealousy, of envy even, and the final result of his meditation was, after all, only the resolve to surround Hyacinth with such splendor and magnificence as no nobleman could surpass, and thus to prove himself a cavalier without equal in the land. With this intention, he told Prince Lignac, during the sumptuous dinner, that he meant to buy the black mare, which for the last few weeks had been the cynosure of the city, and appeared afterwards in the eyes of his betrothed in the sunniest light.

CHAPTER XII.

THE THOROUGH-BRED.

Punctually at three o'clock on that afternoon, the black mare of Prince Lignac was standing at the door of Count Henning's town house, and the prince himself was present, mounted on his famous sorrel stallion, to witness the first ride of the new owner of this famous mare. As the old count had no carriage-horses in the city, the daughter was to mount her favorite pony. Count Eyry rode a thorough-bred dark gray of uncommon strength and beauty. These were fine horses, indeed, that stood here assembled, for the prince and the silent captain were first-rate horsemen, and would sooner have appeared before the countess in a torn coat than badly

mounted, while Liondell chose his horses with the aid of two excellent confederates—an old corporal of dragoons whose eyes had been practiced for more than thirty years in the purchase of horses for his regiment, and a purse full to bursting. When Hyacinth and her betrothed appeared under the stately portico and welcomed the two gentlemen who were waiting there, her eyes fell upon the black with enthusiastic admiration, but her next look went to Amadeus, and in it there was—marvellous to tell—a strange mixture seen of affection and of apprehension. But her experienced eye, and that strange gift to woman, her instinct, told her in a moment that this was not a horse which her betrothed could easily manage. The black mare was standing very quietly, only her eyes were active, and these wondrously large and glowing eyes burnt with a weird, dark fire. Not a white hair disfigured her silken black coat. She was the ideal of the result of blending the Arab blood of the desert with the high blood of the English race-course. Under her fine, satin-like skin the veins showed like a thousand delicate lines, and the long, thin tail whipped her flanks in constant excitement.

“She is the finest horse I ever saw!” exclaimed Hyacinth, in a burst of excitement. “I congratulate you that she is yours, baron. But she is difficile, I fear,” she added.

“I like a horse that is difficile, as you call it,” replied the proud young baron. “Quiet horses soon tire me out.”

“She will give you amusement enough!” said the captain, with emphasis.

“Do not let them frighten you,” said the prince, “my dear baron. Only remember what I told you; a very light hand, a perfectly quiet seat, not even the shadow of the leg to be felt. You will think you mounted a bird!”

The young man felt somewhat uncomfortable. Why did they all speak to him as if he were a novice? He made no reply, helped his betrothed into the saddle, mounted lightly, and rode by the side of the pony. The prince and the count joined the cavalcade, two grooms followed. It was a brilliant spectacle, and all who knew anything of horses stopped in the streets to gaze at the rare horses brought here together.

Hyacinth, in her riding-habit and tall silk hat, looked uncommonly well in the saddle, in which she sat with aristocratic ease, showing at a glance that she was to the "manor born." Liondell watched her with admiring eyes as often as his horse gave him a chance. She went quietly along, but she paid a truly wonderful attention to all that was going on around her, and especially to the slightest motion of the man on her back. A slight blowing announced the interest she took in the events around her. As long as they were riding on the disagreeable, hard pavement of the streets, the horses walked slowly; she, with a delightful, elastic step, and, as it seemed to her rider, literally pushing the upper arm forward from the shoulders, and then putting the tiny round hoofs daintily down, so as to make the motion as pleasant as possible to her rider. It was more of a dance than of a walk.

Liondell was a good horseman and tried his best to follow the prince's suggestions; he felt, besides, soon himself, how important it was to sit perfectly quiet, so as to lull the animal's natural fears, and himself to become more familiar with his new friend. He had to confess to himself that he had never yet mounted a horse of such exquisite delicacy of touch. Every time when one of the other horses got an inch ahead of the mare, she shot forward like a flash of lightning, so that the young baron felt like sitting on the back of an eagle.

But he sat as if he were a Centaur, and his hand moved not, as if cast in bronze. His friends complimented him, and he fancied his betrothed looked at him with admiration.

“Do you know, countess, what brings the prince here—I mean to Berlin?” asked the captain, when they were walking once more.

“Well!” she replied. “Is it a mystery?”

“Pray, Victor,” said the prince, “do not spoil my chances by telling on me.”

“It would be a work of charity to do that!”

“Then I fear they are bad!” said the baron.

“Yes—for he wants to marry!” answered Count Eyry.

“Are those bad intentions?” asked Hyacinth.

“I assure you, countess,” said Prince Lignac, “this cousin of mine is Mephisto in person; he lives on malice, he breakfasts on irony, and dines on sarcasm. Recently I poured out my heart’s heart to him and asked his advice. I came to him, an innocent babe, asking advice as of a loving father. For I am looking out for a wife, and I know nothing of the fair sex. I have no experience, no knowledge. What did he advise me? To count my buttons! Yes—no—yes—and to abide by the decision!”

“And you are really as helpless as you say?” asked Hyacinth again.

“Perfectly so,” replied the prince. “My only hope is now that some lady will take pity on me and advise me.”

“But in order to do that the lady will have to hear your complete confession!” said the count.

“Ladies cannot hear confessions, not even among themselves,” replied the prince.

“Why not?” asked Hyacinth.

“Because Pope Sixtus V. has specially forbidden it. One day the abbesses of the nun’s convents in Rome appeared before him and represented to him how much

better it would be, if, by a special indulgence, he would permit the women in their convents to confess to each other. 'I should willingly grant it,' said the Holy Father, 'but for one doubt I have. You know confessions have to be kept secret, and I do not see how that can be expected of women.' 'Oh,' said the great ladies, 'your Holiness is ill informed. We women can keep a secret quite as well as men and perhaps even better.' 'Well then,' said the wise pope, 'wait a moment and I will give you my answer.' He left the room, but only to return almost immediately with a small box in which he had put a linnet. He handed them the box and begged them to keep it safely. Then he gave them his Apostolic Blessing, and asked them the next day to bring the box back. On their return next day they handed him the box, not without a slight embarrassment, and when the Holy Father opened the box, to be sure, there was the bird—but it was a finch! Then he pointed out to them how hard it would be for them to preserve the secrets of the confessional, when they could not keep the secret of the box for a day."

"And yet you think, prince, that ladies of whose discretion you have such a low opinion, can give you useful advice in so important a matter?"

"I confess, I think so, and moreover I would listen to that lady who of all others was most foolish. For I am disposed, like Orientals, to see in want of judgment a kind of inspired wisdom. Did not our German ancestors consult Druidesses who had put themselves into a kind of ecstasy under their sacred trees, and did not the Greeks go to women sitting on a tripod over villanous smoke that bereft them of their senses and enabled them to prophecy? Now I should have hesitated to consult a Berlin lady on a tripod, because their incense might not be approved of by the Gods of Olympia, but I am sure I

could find a lady unwise enough to answer my purpose. A lady, say, who had married a man she did not love and let another man die, whom she did love, and all this perhaps merely for pecuniary reasons !”

The prince said this in his usual playful and slightly affected manner, which left it doubtful if he was in earnest or not, and under such cover he sent forth his poisonous arrows, but the countess looked at him searchingly, till she blushed to the roots of her hair. Count Eyry had also been roused, and looked at his friend reproachfully. He knew the rudeness of the prince, his pointed tongue, and his love of irritating his best friends under the cover of trifling jests.

Most painfully, however, did these last words wound Baron Amadeus, who did not doubt a moment that they were directed at the company present. The prince, however, nothing daunted, quietly continued : “I have the choice, as you see. When I left Paris the last time, my dear old uncle, the Duke of Lasteqrie, gave me a supper ; there were ten married couples present. Nine of the ladies I might have asked for advice, but I was afraid they might laugh at me. Paris ladies all think you are satirical if you speak of happiness in wedlock. Here in Berlin we are better off ; we still meet now and then a soft heart. By the way, the tenth lady, who lived happily with her husband, I could not have consulted, because she was deaf and dumb. She was a charming woman otherwise, and often led me to think that perhaps the greatest obstacle to marital happiness lies in the fact that both parties have the free use of their tongue.”

“Fortunately,” replied the countess, “not all people have a tongue like yours, prince ; for if it were otherwise, the ceremony of the marriage service might often include the operation of tongue-cutting.”

Amid such frivolous chat they had been walking

along till the prince noticed how excited and impatient the black mare had become, and proposed a gallop.

The horse was really not as quiet as at first, but the fault was with Amadeus, whose black thoughts had all been conjured up again by the prince's reckless way of talking. He thought he had become a target for the wit of his companions, and in this excitement it was of course impossible for him to maintain a calm and even pulse. His blood coursed through his veins as in high fever, and the animal under him, like all fine animal nature, in direct sympathy with its rider, responded to his temper.

As the horses now suddenly started for a quick gallop, and reared and snorted on the right and on the left of her, the black mare seemed to think this was the beginning of a race where it was her duty, as usual, to be first and foremost. With one gigantic leap she therefore sprang forward, and when Amadeus checked her, she reared and leaped so fearfully that Hyacinth could not repress a cry of anxiety. Amadeus drew the reins more fiercely back. Then the animal rose on her hind legs, and for a second stood straight up.

"Give her air ! Give her air !" cried the prince.

But Amadeus, angry at the horse, and angry at the prince's advice, seized his riding-whip at the thin end, and with the heavy, gold knob beat the horse with his full power between the ears.

She instantly came down on her fore feet, and stood still for a moment, shuddering and trembling all over, as if in silent fury ; then she seized the bit with her teeth, and with the swiftness of an arrow flew away in a straight line. The two gentlemen begged the countess to remain where she was, and followed the baron at full speed, but the black mare was immensely superior to their horses in swiftness, and soon was out of sight.

They could still see that where the road turned to the left she did not follow the road, but kept on in a straight line, jumped with one amazing leap over a very wide ditch that there separated the road from the plain, and then disappeared out of sight.

CHAPTER XIII.

CAN VIRTUE BE TAUGHT?

On the day after the birthday solemnity at old Baron Liondell's, the same day on which Amadeus had ridden Prince Lignac's marvellous mare, there was a supper given at the house of millionaire Comet, to which a numerous company had been invited.

The beautiful, large mansion with its broad, low-stepped staircase in white marble, with balusters of exquisitely carved ebony wood and bronze ornaments, was brilliant with a thousand electric lights. Mrs. Comet also had left her favorite "hole in the corner," as the lord and master called it, and come forth into the gorgeous reception-rooms crowded with people. But she was not happy. For a week already she had been complaining; her own physician had advised her to try sea-bathing, and she had sent for her tailor to concoct with him some wonderful bathing costumes. But it had for long years been an open secret in the family that Mrs. Comet never went to the seashore, nor to any other distant place, but cautiously stayed at home, drinking strong black coffee and eating bad, rich cake, together with the richest, fattest dishes she could obtain, which had been prohibited her

at baptism, and which, as the doctors had said, were not without their effect upon her digestive apparatus.

Sylvia looked fairy-like. She was dressed in light blue gauze, embroidered in silver. According to the then prevailing fashion the robe clung very closely to the slender form, and had a long train which was most becoming to her figure. She wore exquisite silver filagree work, with diamonds in her hair, around her neck and her arms. Her betrothed thought her ravishing, and everybody said that the world did not have another such couple to show, as these young, remarkably handsome people, Edward Frank and Sylvia Comet.

"Have you called at Liondell's?" Mr. Comet asked the young man.

"Certainly, early this morning!" was the reply.

"And the result?"

"The gods only know," said Frank, in his usual open manner, with a smile in his face. "I confess the Liondell villa seems to me not only well built, richly decorated, and in the best condition, but also arranged in the most convenient manner. I only wish I had built it, and I cannot see what objection the old gentleman can have to the fine building!"

"Did you tell him that?" asked Mr. Comet pointedly.

"Certainly!" was the simple answer.

"Mr. Son-in-law that is to be," said the old man with a bitterly ironical face, "opportunity has hair only in front—behind, she is bald. He who misses her once has no chance of catching her again."

Therewith he turned aside to receive his guests. Sylvia looked reproachfully at her betrothed. "Papa is so irritable—you ought surely to be very careful not to wound him, Edward," she said. "He has so much to do of the greatest importance, and of late he seems to be literally over-burdened, and is evidently nervous.

Nevertheless, he took pains to enlist Baron Liondell in your behalf, and now you have defeated his whole plan."

Mrs. Rachel had been standing near, so as to hear what was said, and was now looking ironically at the two, presenting for the moment a striking resemblance to her brother, Doctor Steelyard. Before Edward could answer, she laid her hand on his arm and asked him to take her through the room.

"Are you really much in love with Sylvia?" she asked in her usual blunt way.

"Why, she is my betrothed," replied Edward, who knew the old lady's oddities.

"That does not say much," she replied ill-naturedly. "All these gay dolls that are walking about here to-night have been betrothed in their time, or they are so now, or they wish to be so. But whether they are all loved by an honest heart such as yours is, Edward—that is another question!"

"What do you mean, dear mamma?" asked Edward, disconcerted.

"Nothing!" she said. "My head aches and my thoughts are all black to-night. I cannot endure large entertainments. The people ruin my carpets, stain my fine damask, drink the cellar dry, and then go and make fun of us who were foolish enough to invite them. Take me into the cabinet and tell me something of the new discoveries in Troy. You will get back to Sylvia time enough."

Tedious as this was to Edward, he did as she wished, and told her about Schliemann and Hermann. He felt sorry for the poor woman, who was evidently unhappy, and was glad to be able to do her a favor. At the same time he felt troubled by the peculiar manner in which she had to-day spoken of her daughter. Did she want to warn him against Sylvia's lust of power, against her

perhaps unconscious desire to make him her slave? And still it seemed to be unnatural that a mother should warn a would-be son-in-law against her own child.

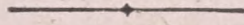
On the other hand he felt pained by Sylvia's repeating her father's sneering remark. It was always the same song, the same policy she had suggested to him in the park: He was to betray his own artistic convictions in order to make money—to change his upright character to worship Mammon! This thought came to him: Happy the man whose wife has neither father nor mother, neither brothers nor sisters, neither wealth nor ambition, a wife without everything—except the love of her husband.

Unconsciously the image of the fair orphan arose before his mind's eye. He had not seen her again, but he had thought of her often. She had gone to Punkinton, and since that time she had not been heard of. Was she happy there? She was so unpretending, so grateful! He had not spoken of her to his betrothed, following Mrs. Lehman's wise counsel.

In the meantime dancing was going on, and in the other rooms circles were formed, as people met who had this or that social feature in common. Among the guests were many eminent men, scholars and artists, soldiers and sailors, deputies and diplomats. In the last of a long suite of rooms, farthest from the ball-room, a circle of elderly ladies and gentlemen had taken refuge, and were here busy discussing great and grave questions of Art, Science and Politics. They were in the midst of a discussion which threatened to become almost violent in speech as in argument, when all of a sudden a strange stillness fell upon the circle. The merry noise of the great assembly all at once ceased to be heard, then the music also stopped, the dancers, still arm in arm, paused, and everybody whispered and asked, but no answer

came to allay the increasing horror. The men and women of the last room, who had been heated by the vehemence of their discussion, also rose and made their way towards the ball-room, to seek an explanation of this sudden appalling silence.

At that moment Mrs. Clara Steelyard came rushing into the room, and hastening with burning cheeks to her husband, she cried: "Amadeus has been thrown by his horse and has broken his neck!" Then in a whisper she added, close to his ear, "We and the Comets are the nearest heirs!"



CHAPTER XIV.

A BROKEN REED.

Lieutenant Steelyard's heart was divided; one half was happy, but the other half was full of care and anxiety. He was happy because the famous artist, Chessa Molini, had shown herself gracious to him—unhappy, because his debts were growing at a fearful rate. Since that evening when he had mainly kept the enraged Arab from injuring the great singer, the bond of intimacy that bound him and the beauty to each other had been tightening daily. He was often admitted to her inner domesticity, and to hear in advance, at home, the magnificent compositions which she proposed to play before the great public. Alfonse understood music. He could converse with her intelligently as to many a concealed beauty that had escaped her, and, if need be, he could even accompany her on the piano when she practised at home. In the affair of the necklace, also, she asked Alfonse's advice, and he made several happy suggestions. She engaged

therefore, a distinguished lawyer, and met the accusations of the interpreter with the simple assertion that she knew nothing of what he claimed. Still, she kept her transactions with her lawyer even from Alfonse, taking no one into her confidence. The Dragoman was very generally blamed for having caused such a public scandal, especially as he sought to shelter himself under diplomatic privileges. He was recalled shortly after and sent to Washington, and there were people who thought the sudden and great change in the climate might have affected his mind.

What the Señorita herself thought of the whole affair could not be ascertained, for she and her devoted Spanish servant preserved the most absolute silence, and only expressed their indignation at the brutality of the Arab whenever the topic was touched in their presence. The artist seemed also to be unaware of her connection with the Liondell family, and if poor Amadeus had been more clear-sighted in this direction, it was because he knew so much of her past history, of which the wild, Cuban girl had, of course, remained ignorant. To him, therefore, the Arab's statement sounded quite natural, although he thought it better not to betray his intimate knowledge. Chessa, on her side, never uttered the name of Liondell. She maintained her assertion that she was a Molini from Barcelona, and as her papers supported this statement, no doubts were entertained. Alfonse believed every word she said; for Alfonse loved her!

But this love gave him much trouble, caused him much pain, plunged him into many even greater embarrassments, and he ground his teeth when he found the poetry of his heart clogged by the poverty of his purse. He was, as yet, the most favored of all the worshipers at Chessa's altar, but, to do this, he had to lead the same life as she

did, and alas ! this life was fearfully expensive ! All his rivals were rich young men, who either had, or hoped for, large fortunes. They dined daily at the fashionable hotel in which the singer had her rooms ; supper was every day ordered at one or the other first-class restaurants, baskets of champagne, very dry and very dear, gigantic bouquets of rarest roses and orchids, carriages and horses—all these things were looked upon, not as luxuries, but as matters of daily expenditure, as needful as the light of the sun and the air they breathed. But the admirers of the Spanish lady noticed that she appreciated such evidences of their devotion with special gratitude as possessed an intrinsic value, and soon began to vie with each other in making her more substantial presents. Even the most gorgeous bouquets of rarest flowers, had, in her eyes, a more personal value if they concealed in the centre a bracelet or a brooch, a medallion, or some other souvenir adorned with precious stones.

Alfonse could not alone refuse her such offerings, for his influence with her would have suffered sorely. He was not a prince like Lignac, who never made her a present—he was a prince and that was enough. His mere appearance in her box at the theatre, or in her suite at a concert was honor enough, and counted for many a precious present. But not so with the others, who belonged to the common herd of mankind ; they were appreciated in precise proportion to the offerings they could bring to her altar. Alfonse found one day with horror, that he had spent in six weeks' courtship at the feet of the artist, more than his pay of two years.

His name was mentioned in the best circles, and appeared in the newspapers always as one of the best and highest in society. That was some compensation. People who went to church and read the Bible, never condemned the children of this world who in their

frivolity broke the laws of God and of man, without including him among those who were very bad, so that the hearts of all the innocent young maidens beat high when he appeared. This was satisfaction, no doubt, and Alfonse enjoyed it hugely—nevertheless he would have enjoyed it better yet if some one had offered to pay his debts.

One morning towards six o'clock as he came home, his father, who was an early riser, called him into his study. He followed him, feeling rather uncomfortable. He had always felt the inconvenience of living under his parents' roof, but, so far, the tangible advantages had outweighed the drawbacks.

“Well, my dear Alfonse,” said Doctor Steelyard, “I hope you are a very happy man.”

“How do you mean?” asked Alfonse.

“Well, you seem to amuse yourself royally, since you spend the whole night in your entertainments.”

“We had a little dance which lasted till two or three, and then we sat together, drinking a glass of beer, and I could not well get away without appearing unsociable.”

“Why, my dear young friend,” said the old man, “no need for excuses. I do not blame you in the least that you enjoy life. Every one of us tries to make existence as pleasant as we can, and I confess frankly, if it gave me more pleasure to dance and drink at night than to sleep, I would do it also.”

Alfonse smiled, but it was a forced smile; he did not trust the peaceful aspect.

“Tastes differ,” continued the father quietly. “Many men care only for pleasure, others for hard work, and tastes even vary with the different ages, so that the man who was wildest in youth often becomes the hardest worker when he grows old. But nobody can tell what is the end of the whole story, and Solomon certainly was

right in his saying, that the wise man and the fool all fare alike."

"*Cum grano salis*," said Alfonse, "although my mind is just now hardly clear enough to explain that to you accurately. Only, I wish you would not think that my life is wholly made up of amusement. If I could gain anything by hard work you would soon see me try it, but as it is, it matters not in the least what I do, if I only do my duty, and that I never neglect."

Alfonse understood his father very well, and saw that he was trying to make him feel how wearisome and unprofitable such a life must needs be for any one who was not content to remain unknown and useless in the world. He felt in his heart that he was dissatisfied with his own life and unhappy; his former cheerfulness had left him entirely. Now his old father rose, and putting his hand on his shoulder, looked at him long and earnestly. There was such kindness in the way this was done that Alfonse caught at his father's other hand, pressed it affectionately, and looked him frankly in the face. And when the old man told him how he felt for his child, Alfonse could no longer resist, but told him all, and confessed that a heavy burden was weighing him down, a very considerable debt. "If I were lucky enough to get rid of my debts," he said, "I would begin an entirely new life. These balls and parties and concerts by no means amuse me so supernaturally that I could not readily live without them, if I were but a free man. I cannot expect that you would pay such an enormous sum for me, but if you could help me to find a way out I should be immensely obliged to you. I should never again go into debt!"

"That reminds me of the story of the wise Memnon," said the old father, "as Voltaire tells it. I am not a blind admirer of Voltaire's—the lower part of his fore-

head was imperfectly developed—nevertheless we can learn much of him. This Memnon of his was a rich, handsome young man, who one morning resolved never again to commit a folly, and thus to be forever happy. In the course of the day many things happened to him that may happen to the best of us, and when he reached home at a late hour of night, he was drunk, disgraced at court, had lost his whole fortune, and moreover was short of one eye.”

Alfonse smiled, for his father had evidently meant thus to tell him that he also had been merely the victim of what might befall every one and any one. He felt at once in better humor, and gave his father now a detailed account of his position, including his hopes and his apprehensions. Only of his attachment to the Spanish singer he did not venture to speak, and tried to think of it as too trifling a matter to be mentioned in such a confession.

The father spoke gently to his son, reminding him that his debts amounted to more than his parents could possibly raise without exposing themselves in their old age to privations which would be hard to endure. But these debts, he said, are worse still for the young man himself, who thus has accustomed himself to a trifling manner of life.

“I could make you free,” he concluded, “but I have no certainty that you will not return to the same way of living as long as you remain in a position which daily exposes you to new temptations. You are not the man to be severe to yourself, and to adhere rigidly and sternly to your resolves. Why did you enter the army? I was opposed to it—always!”

“Am I worse than others?” cried Alfonse, with flashing eyes. “Is no one capable of being a gentleman whose grandmother was not already a perfect lady? I often

encounter a certain coldness in military circles. I at least want to forget the blood in my veins !”

“Nothing less than that will satisfy you ?” said the old man, with a smile of ineffable bitterness. “You mean to restore the Jewish people in the estimation of your comrades and your society ? My son, that is a dream—even as a dream impossible. On the other hand, I will show you a way that will suit you better, and is at least feasible.”

He next proceeded to point out to Alfonse the joy and the happiness which follow a fixed amount of work, in which industry and skill meet their reward, without continually bringing about more or less friction, arising from the difference in race and in early training, and then he invited him to leave the army and to accept a desk in the counting-house of a friend in London as correspondent.

Alfonse was surprised, but not distressed. His first feeling was that it would be pleasant to begin something entirely new. He liked change. The next was regret at leaving the Spaniard. Then he wavered between the pro and the contra of the offer. But the certainty, not openly declared, but just as clearly understood, that his father would not pay his debts except on this condition, and the conviction that his present calling did not fully suit him, and the conviction finally of his father’s goodness and wisdom, triumphed in the end.

He promised to resign from the army and to go to London. In the meantime the breakfast hour had approached, and he took his coffee with his parents and the younger children. Here he told them of his conversation with the father. Mrs. Clara raised her hands to Heaven and exclaimed :

“There is your father as he lives and has his being ! Oh, Alfonse, Alfonse ! what I have suffered through him in my life, you will never, never know it ! When I think

of my sister-in-law, Rachel, and what a part she plays in the great world, and how well she is off! She sits and chats with the wives of Privy Councilors, and whatever she wants she has! What have I? No friends, no acquaintances! Not that I complain of my husband—far from it!—but there never lived a man with so little respect for himself, so little ambition for his family. You are to send in your resignation, after having passed through the war honorably and safely; now, after having been ordered to attend the lectures at the War Academy! My boy, that is nonsense! That must not be! No man in his senses will throw away what has cost him twenty years' hard service. To jump from one profession into another is always a blunder, for one is not better than the other, and we only cast away what we have gained in the first. But your father never was satisfied with your being an officer,—it cost me hard work to get his consent. He thinks because he himself does not care for distinction, other people ought to do the like. But I am proud of you, Alfonse, and I will not have it that you lay aside your uniform. I was so happy when I saw you for the first time in it!—and then when you safely returned from the war, and adorned with the Iron Cross! That was the greatest joy I ever had in my life!"

The tears were racing down her wrinkled cheeks, and Alfonse kissed her tenderly.

"It is as yet only a project, dear mamma," he said. "Nothing is decided yet."

"Your father is a great man, Alfonse," she continued, "but like all great men he has his peculiarities. We must not mind them. His greatest defect is that he has no ambition. I tell you he might be rich and famous, for he knows more than most of those men who rise to

honor and wealth. But he laughs at everybody and at everything, and does not care what becomes of us."

"The mischief however, is, my dear mamma, that I owe two thousand dollars!"

"What!" said his mother, "and for that sum you will abandon a brilliant career? It is a big sum, Alfonse, for our circumstances, and you are much to blame that you have acted so recklessly. But since it is done, we must see how we can pay it. You must resolutely make up your mind never hereafter to spend one dollar beyond what you receive. That is the fundamental law of sound economy."

"It is a terrible thought for me to cost you so much money, and to compel you to submit to so many privations."

"We must try to find a way out. Your father need not know anything about it. The main point is that you remain in the army, and keep up your acquaintance with all the great people whom you know. I should like so much if you could remain here in Berlin and be attached to the person of some great prince or general. One must be here at the centre to be noticed and promoted. If you are once lost in the big crowd, nobody thinks of you. As to the money, don't you trouble yourself. I'll manage that. We are, besides, the Liondell heirs now, since poor Amadeus has broken his neck. Uncle Liondell cannot live much longer, although I most sincerely wish him a very long life. It would be consummate folly to resign now and become a little clerk. Never mind the money, Alfonse. I tell you I take charge of that! You are clever, my son, and have everything that makes the officer. You must be a general if all goes right."

"That is so!" replied Alfonse. "I also think it would be unwise to change my calling. But can you really get the money, mother dear?"

"I shall get it from Uncle Baldwin or from Uncle Liondell. One of the two will surely give it to me. Only—do not think of leaving the army—do you hear?"

"I promise, mother dear," he said, and kissed her. "Oh, Chessa," he sighed, "you cost me dear."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MARIONETTES AND THE WIRES.

Baron Simon Liondell had aged sadly in the few weeks since the terrible death of his dearly beloved only child, and fully justified the prophetic warning of his niece, Clara Steelyard. The life in his eyes, the comfortable repose in all his motions, had disappeared. He sat for hours brooding over financial reports, and his voice was but rarely heard now in the telephones that radiated from his seat at the table. He looked pale, emaciated, and his hair had turned white.

"My son told me a day before his death," he said to Count Henning, whom he had begged to come and see him, "that he wished I held no mortgage on your lands. My son was sad that day, but he spoke with great love of your daughter Hyacinth."

Two lonely tears stole forth from the weary eyes of the poor old gentleman. The count seized his hand and pressed it cordially.

"I wish that my son shall have cherished no wish that was not gratified," continued the banker, "and I have requested you to come to me, count, because I have to tell you that I no longer hold any mortgage on your property."

The count looked up amazed.

“Here are the papers,” said the old man. “I put them into your hands. Your castle and your acres are free of any burden.”

The count, colorless and with fast-beating heart, took the documents which the banker moved from the table and held out to him. They were the certificates of debts which had furnished the first cause for the betrothal of his daughter to the unfortunate young man. For a moment he could not seize the matter; he did not at once measure the bearing of this simple act.

Thus he stood for a minute, silent and undecided. At last he realized it. The old man wished to testify to his grief for his son in the most dignified manner.

“Your daughter, Hyacinth, has mourned for my son Amadeus. She is a good girl. She has loved my child. Amadeus loved her dearly, that I know. I only act in his name and commission if I release the father’s indebtedness. Take the papers home with you, count, or put them into the fire. The debt is paid!”

“Noble soul!” said the count, and looked at the poor old man with tearful eyes. But his pride did not allow him to accept the gift. He put the papers back on the table, and seizing both of the banker’s hands, he said:

“My friend, I thank you! I am as grateful to you as if I had accepted this enormous present, and I rejoice unspeakably to meet with such nobility of sentiment in a world that is so replete with egotism. But I cannot accept your present.”

“Do not look at it as a present. Consider it a legacy left you by my son, whose executor I am, and erect a marble image of the young man among the statues of your ancestors in your hereditary castle.”

“It cannot be?” replied the count, after a pause.

The banker's face darkened and he cast a sombre look at his visitor.

"Do not misunderstand me," said the count. "I am very grateful to you for your kind intentions, but I cannot accept a present for which I can make no return. The sense of such an obligation would crush me. A nobleman can accept presents only from his sovereign." He rose to his full height, bowed his noble head low before the poor old man, who had sunk back into his wide arm-chair, and said: "Your son's monument shall stand in my castle," putting his arm around the sorrowing father's shoulders, "and in my heart there stands already an imperishable memorial of your noble generosity. God has not willed it that our families should be united, but we are bound to each other in the esteem I cherish for you, and in the sympathy created within us by a common calamity. I hope we shall be friends in the evening of our lives!"

The banker seized his visitor's hands, and as he looked up to him tears dimmed his vision.

"Hyacinth," said the count, when he returned home late, "I have been pleased to see that Count Eyry has of late been here but rarely. This shows a tact which I appreciate. I hope you will make it permanent. I wish that we live in perfect retirement during the time of our mourning."

"Count Eyry has just sent me a telegram stating that he has asked for leave of absence to join a Russian expedition on the Caspian Sea."

"So much the better!" replied the count.

During the same hours the banker had an interview with his lawyer. This eminent man, renowned for his marvelous knowledge of man and his keen insight into the most hidden things, was reporting to the old baron the further results of his investigation in the history of

the Liondell family. The old banker had long since adopted his son's opinion that Chessa was the daughter of his brother who perished in Cuba, and in dark hours he had actually fancied that his son's death might be the penalty inflicted upon him for having left his own brother's child so long unacknowledged. And yet, he was bound, in such a matter, to proceed cautiously, and, after all, Amadeus might be mistaken. But now the report of the advocate confirmed this view in every point. Chessa herself, driven hard by the cunning lawyer, had at last acknowledged of her own free will that she was born in Cuba, the daughter of Benjamin Liondell. Of her relatives in Europe she knew nothing, her ignorance of German having left her even yet ignorant of the existence of the rich Baron Liondell.

The latter was, unlike his former habit, at a loss what to do. The blow he had received when the hope and the consolation of his old age were at once taken from him, had paralyzed his will-power. He was inclined to send for his niece, to take her in his arms and to adopt her as his own child ; but then there arose before his mind's eye the stern refusal of his son to agree to this step, and he could not do anything that was so repugnant to his beloved son. At last he resolved to choose a middle way, that might comply with what was due to his brother's memory and serve at the same time to protect the pride and the wealth of the family. He was confirmed in this view by the statement of the lawyer that the artist had gathered around her a circle of admirers, among whom Prince Lignac was the most prominent. He sent for him to consult with him on a question concerning his property, and at the same time warned the lawyer that he meant to make a new will. The effects of this conversation were soon perceived in those circles in which the two parties were best known ; first of all by the artist

herself and by her faithful admirer, Alfonse, who had returned to his worship with renewed zeal and fervor since he had a prospect of seeing his debts paid.

“Why so sober, my beautiful one?” he asked her one afternoon, as he was about to accompany her on the piano, and she dreamily leant on the instrument and looked at him with her burning black eyes.

“I am thinking.”

“And of what, if I may ask?”

She would not tell him. She sighed and went to the window, watching the passers-by, and glancing at an album that was lying in her lap. Alfonse looked over her shoulder. What a series of various faces!

“Were you also in Lydia and Moesia, in Persia and Pamphylia?” he asked.

“Very near,” she replied.

“Who is this man with the long nose and the Chinese eyes?”

“This man? That is Count Lewin, Intendant of the Italian Opera in St. Petersburg!”

“How did he get into your album?”

“I was there and sang on trial.”

“You never told me!”

“It was only for a very short time. Oh! if you could see St. Petersburg, my dear friend, you would open your eyes! There things are very different from here.”

Alfonse smiled weakly and felt an attack of jealousy.

She closed the album and put it aside. Then she asked: “What is your religion?”

He replied, “I think the Berlin religion!”

“Do not talk so wickedly,” she said, and beat him on the cheek with her fan. “Tell me at once!”

“I have a desperate religion; I worship the goddess Chessa.”

“You are intolerable ! Can't you say a sensible word ? What is your religion ?”

“Well, what is the usual religion here ? I am, of course, a Protestant, Evangelical, or whatever you choose to call it.”

“Then you go to hell !” said Chessa.

“I am already there, thanks to you ! But what is your religion ?”

“I am a Catholic.”

“Then you go to Heaven !”

“Do not talk such fearful things, Alfonse ! I do not want to go to Heaven yet awhile. We must not say blasphemous things. Our Church forbids that. But tell me in earnest. What must I do ? Prince Lignac is a Catholic. What do you think of him ? You are my friend, tell me !”

“What do you think of Prince Lignac ? He is also a Catholic ? What questions are these ? What have you to do with the prince and with the Catholic Church ?”

“I might marry a Catholic.”

“Marry ! Whom are you going to marry ?” Alfonse almost roared.

“Great Heavens ! No one !” replied the artist. “The thing is this : the prince has declared himself, and I do not know what to do ! I am a stranger here and do not know the country. I know nothing. Is he a rich prince ? Is he a prince at all ? Go away ! You are an ugly man !”

She broke out in tears, and hid her face as far as the wee bit of a handkerchief permitted, which mostly consisted of lace. But Alfonse was angry ; he pretended not to see it. He took up the album and stared at the Mongolian eyes without knowing what he saw. “You have sometimes strange notions, Chessa !” he said after a long interval, as the singer continued to sob.

“I have not a single friend,” she said at last. “They all treat me badly, and so do you ;—just like them. But I did not expect it of you.’

The two quarreled for some time, till at last the artist’s good sense prevailed, and the conversation turned into more sensible channels. She confessed that she was strongly inclined to accept the prince’s offer, if she only knew that she could safely do so. Was he a real prince? And had he really a large fortune? It looked as if her experience in life had not been favorable to princes generally. Then she gave him her reasons.

“Singing,” she said, “is a good profession, but it is risky. Sickness, an accident, a mere cold, may upset it all. To marry this Prince Lignac is the best chance that fate has yet held out to me, provided always he is really the *grand seigneur* he professes to be.” She begged, therefore, her friend Alfonse to be her adviser in this serious matter, especially as she was such an utter stranger here and did not speak a word of German.

Alfonse was astonished, and wondered and wondered. Perhaps, if he had known of the interview between the Spaniard and the old banker’s agent, he might have been less surprised. But she did not tell him a word of that. She feared she might produce an unfavorable impression upon Alfonse if he discovered that she was a Cuban by birth, and he might possibly believe even the fabulous story of the Turkish interpreter.

When he at last found out that she was really in earnest, and that a union between her and Prince Lignac was really contemplated, he rose, took his helmet and sword, stepped, with fury in his eyes, before the terrified woman, and bade her farewell forever! He told her in fiery words that she was a heartless being to expect of him assistance in her plans, that he had of course no claims on her love, that on the contrary he had always

known that the auctioneer was the only man fit to dispose of her heart, and then he marched out, more wretched than he had ever dreamt he could be. He had no sooner breathed more freely upon being relieved of the terrible burden of his debts, when fate sent him this greater grief to bear!

He quarreled bitterly with fate. He had so much talent for art, so much love for all that was beautiful, such benevolence for all created beings, such a keen intellect, such genuine devotion to Science! And yet, withal, he was a poor little lieutenant, who could not profit by all these noble qualifications. Ought he not to have had a father who could have given him, say, twenty thousand a year? Was there a man living who would have made better use of that amount than he? He would have been Maecenas to all that was great and beautiful and holy, and—he would have married the great prima donna Molini.

“But to him that hath shall be given,” sneered he to himself, and went to a club where he knew he would meet at this hour a score of half-drunk artists, drank in despair two bottles of wines, played baccarat, lost all the money he had and twice as much upon his word of honor, and at four in the morning he went perfectly furious to bed, but not to sleep.

The Spaniard on her part, had spent an hour at least, remaining motionless in the same chair, sunk in meditation, and then she had written a note to Baron Liondell's lawyer, requesting him to call on her at his earliest convenience. She wanted to know why he had questioned her so closely about her Cuban history, and at the same time ascertain Prince Lignac's actual status in society.

At the same hour the prince was in the rooms of his friend, Count Eyry, who was superintending the packing of his field equipage, after having that morning received

a telegram from the Russian Minister of War which ordered him to proceed at once and without delay to the headquarters of General Skobelev in Orenburg.

He was examining his Colt's navy pistol, and listened, without moving a feature, to his friend's announcement of his engagement to the fair Spanish artist.

"Why do you not wish me joy?" asked the prince.

"I do congratulate you," said the count.

"But do you approve of my choice?" he asked next.

"My dear Lignac, you have a habit that is not rare among men. You do what you like to do, and then you come and ask advice!"

"Let me tell you one thing, my dear friend, the matter lies deeper than the world can see; you would be astonished to hear that the Molini in reality is a Liondell, the millionaire's own niece. Till our wedding takes place, however, this is to remain a secret."

"My good prince, I have long since ceased to be surprised," said the other, put the pistol in its case, and tried the sharp edge of his heavy cavalry sword.

"Then you will not wonder, also," continued the prince, "when I tell you that my finances are quite glad to be reinforced by the step I am going to take. I have my hotel in Paris, I have my estates in Normandy, I have both an old and a new castle here in Germany, but all that costs a sum to maintain. We poor noblemen, who do not continue to add to our fortune, naturally grow poorer from year to year, and with some of us the deluge will not even wait till after us. The revenues which made my grandfather a rich man at Versailles, are not half the same in my life-time, and hardly enable me to live. I economize as I can—here in Berlin I live as a bachelor at a hotel; I have hardly any servants, and keep only three or four horses—and yet I find it hard to make both ends meet. Hence I find a good match

acceptable, and old Liondell promises to provide liberally for this young lady, who is his niece beyond all doubt."

"But why must it needs be a Spanish singer?"

"But I thought I told you she is a Liondell, and not a Molini!"

"So much the worse!"

"Why that?"

"I should not have thought you would continue the grand old Lignac race in a line of mules."

"My dear Victor, I confess I cannot understand how a man who stands at the very highest summit of modern views of society, can still cling to such mediæval prejudices! What does it mean when anybody speaks of the purity of his blood? Does he say that the blood in noble veins is better than that which flows in other bodies? Blood is blood. Besides, I am a French citizen, and our code does not know what *mesalliance* means."

"And that she is a Jewess, what of that?"

"A Jewess? And you really mention that in speaking of my marriage?"

"Yes, I do, and very seriously, my dear Lignac. The question is a grave one. You may laugh, you may rage, but you cannot get over that stumbling block. She is a Jewess if she is a Liondell."

"I deny that, my dear Victor. She is not a Jewess. Chessa was baptized ten years ago or more. She is a Catholic."

"Oh," said the captain, with a peculiar tone of voice, "she is a Catholic. Well, that changes the position! To be sure—a Catholic!"

"I am sorry to see that you ascribe so little power to the baptizing water, my dear Victor! But even if you should be right, why must a Jewess needs be worse

than any other lady? It seems to me this unfortunate race has suffered enough, moving continually up and down this earth of ours, that we in our day must begin once more to persecute them. I should think they were entitled to our pity and compassion, instead of being hated, persecuted and despised."

"If those are your views, my dear Lignac, you had better marry your Chessa. My views differ. I hate Jews because they crucified my Saviour, but I think there must have been, from the beginning, something repulsive about them, or they would not have been so systematically disliked and ill-treated by the world in all ages."

The prince shrugged his shoulders. He had exhausted his arguments, and as usual, neither of the two disputants was convinced.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PERILOUS LOVE.

Mr. Comet was on his way to his pale, passionate lady friend, who had recently returned from a protracted visit to the seashore, when, to his astonishment, her husband, Baron Blank, himself opened the door. The two gentlemen had not seen each other since his departure to the coast. Baron Blank generally avoided meeting Mr. Comet, as he believed that the man who pleased the wife was by no means always the man who also pleased the husband. He went his way and let his wife go her way. This it was that surprised the financier so greatly to-day. Still the host invited him most courteously to walk into his room, gave him an excellent cigar, and spoke pleasantly of the weather and the opera. The

financier came to the conclusion that the baron wanted to borrow money, and wondered how much it would be? But this time he was mistaken.

“Do you know Prince Lignac?” asked the baron.

“Not personally.”

“If you like it, I will present you. He is in my wife’s rooms now. A very amiable, very interesting man. We became acquainted last spring at the Alliance Club, that night when the scandal with the Turkish dragoman took place. It happened so that we met again this summer at the seaside, where we saw much of each other. It was a pity you were not there too.”

“My physician had sent me to Carlsbad.”

There followed a pause in the conversation.

“Has he been long there?” asked Mr. Comet.

“Nearly two hours,” replied his host, after having studied the clock carefully.

Another pause.

“Where do you buy your tobacco?” asked the statesman.

“Do you like my cigars?”

“It is a pleasant, mild leaf, so that I am almost sorry to give up the cigar. But I should like to make the acquaintance of the prince. He is very popular.”

Baron Blank rang a bell. “Go to your mistress,” he told the servant who entered, “and ask her if she would receive us.”

The man returned with the answer that she would be very happy to see them both.

“Then come!” said the baron, and the two gentlemen went to the lady’s part of the house.

The great statesman was in a most excitable state of mind. He had a vague feeling that things were no longer as they had been. He had often been here when no such ceremonies had been deemed necessary, and he

knew enough of Prince Lignac to consider his intimacy at the seashore and his two hours' visit rather suspicious. This made him feel more and more strongly that his relations to Lily were not of a nature to give him much pleasure. In fact they had become well nigh intolerable since she had begun to worry about her daughter's address. He determined to break with her. But he had done so before, and again and again some fatality had come between him and his resolve. He, the energetic man, had no energy when confronting a woman. But to-day Fate seemed to be propitious. The name of the prince made his blood course rapidly; like a flash of lightning it flew through his mind that to-day he must avail himself of the opportunity; to-day, when at last the right was on his side.

The fair lady lay in her favorite position, fully extended on a purple velvet *chaise-longue*, her head resting on her fine hand, and the prince was seated near her. She did not rise, but welcomed the new-comers by a gesture of the hand. The prince, however, rose most courteously and bowed, sympathizing at once most feelingly with Mr. Comet on account of the tragic loss of his kinsman, Amadeus. He said he would never be able to forgive himself for having sold that wild horse to the young man, thus causing, though unintentionally, the terrible calamity.

Mr. Comet deprecated any such responsibility, and the conversation soon drifted into a variety of channels, though all felt that there was something unknown at work, which might at any moment cause an explosion. They discussed thus also a portrait of a young girl which Lily had bought that morning from an art dealer, and which now was standing on a chair near the prince.

"It is a face which has a truly wonderful charm for me," she said. "It attracted me at the first glance."

“Whose work is it?” asked the prince.

“The name ‘Lehman’ stands here in the corner—an unknown artist. But the picture is such a happy one that I feel tempted to predict for the painter a brilliant future.”

“I almost fancy I see a resemblance to you,” said the prince. “There is something in the whole expression and the shape of the brow.”

The prince noticed that she seemed not to care for compliments in Mr. Comet’s presence, and so he turned the conversation to another subject.

“I look with admiration at your cat,” he said, passing his soft hand over the glossy fur of the creature, who acknowledged the caress with a soft purring. “I have seldom seen such a magnificent animal—and so intelligent. It reminds me of one of my great, great, great-aunts, who in the wars of the Fronde had been driven out of a village by artillery, and yet returned through a hot fire to rescue a little dog of hers that had been forgotten in her bed. Many people maintain that animals have no souls. But I differ from them. It is sheer pride. We want to be something better and higher than they, and because it is unpleasant to us that we crush our cousins and kinswomen between our teeth, we assert that they have no souls. According to my experience animals have minds as good as ours; in fact, I have owned horses that had more sense than their riders.”

“They must, of course, have been remarkably clever creatures,” observed Doctor Comet, dryly.

“Oh, uncommonly clever,” replied the prince. “One of them had actually been taught to count by my coachman, and, in consequence, became a candidate for the post of director of a large bank in Paris; unfortunately, they found out that the animal was too honest for the place. How do you like Zola, baroness?”

“I think him abominable, prince,” said Lily.

“Is he not?” replied the latter. “That was my reason for introducing the author to you.”

“That!”

“Yes, I thought you would do as all the ladies in France have done. Not one of them would trust any man’s judgment. They must all convince themselves how wicked he is.”

“Those books ought to be prohibited,” said Baron Blank. “They are immoral. It is a perfect scandal to see what dirty stuff that man has accumulated in his books.”

“Yes,” said the prince, “that is my opinion exactly. Such books ought to be prohibited, for they slander society. Any one who reads Zola’s books, for instance, would imagine that good society in Paris was, just now, a pool of iniquity—whilst we all know that in reality it is the superfinest bloom of modern culture.”

Doctor Comet listened to this conversation, which was spun out to great length, in impatient silence. Lily liked to appear in confidential familiarity with the prince, and showed Dr. Comet but scant courtesy. He told himself again and again that the crisis had come, and this was the day.

When the prince rose to go to the opera, and Baron Blank prepared to accompany him, Comet asked Lily to give him a cup of tea, and settled down in the most comfortable of her arm-chairs. The low tea-table was brought in, the handsome silver service shone in the bright light, and the humming tea-kettle made a kind of running accompaniment to the broken conversation, when suddenly the thought flashed through his mind,—now is the time! An outsider would have thought that all was peace and happiness in this cozy, comfortable room. But in Lily’s eyes there was a strange weariness and in-

difference, resembling the look of a beast of prey that seems but half awake, and in every gesture, in every glance of the eye that her guest received, there was a shade of contempt, which he felt but too keenly, accustomed as he was to watch the slightest turn of her supple hands, the bend of her proud neck, the play of her ever-stirring eyebrows, and the smallest change in the intonation of her voice. This mute trifling with him irritated him till he was in a quiet state of rage and entirely forgot his purpose of having a final rupture with his strange hostess.

He seized the arm of his chair with a furious grasp, took up his tea cup, drained it, and then pushed it away from him, nearly letting it fall on the other side of the table. Lily looked at him contemptuously. As yet not a word had been spoken by either of them, but this look of hers made him lose his self-control completely, and he began to speak :

“How could you amuse yourself two whole hours with this idle talker ?”

“Whom do you mean ?” she asked, with assumed astonishment.

“Prince Lignac !” he replied curtly.

“You think he is shallow !”

“Perhaps you think him deep, with his great-great aunt, Henrietta of France and her apocryphal cat. I cannot understand how one of these princes, who run about by the dozen all over Germany, Russia and Italy, can dare to speak of his royal relations ! He must think us great fools.”

“Prince Lignac belongs to a very good family ; his name is in the Almanac de Gotha,” replied Lily, with a cool and haughty smile which exasperated him still more. “He has been presented and invited at Court, and has

several orders which are never bestowed upon men of humble or doubtful origin."

"You seem to be very accurately informed about the young man?"

"I always take an interest in attractive people."

"I know that," he replied with bitterness. "When I had the honor of becoming acquainted with you, you were only nineteen, but if I remember right, you had even then already taken a deep interest in several amiable men. You were, as Shakespeare uncivilly says, 'A morsel grown cold which I picked up from other people's plates.'"

Lily's eyes glowed in low but burning fire at this new insult, but she knew herself, and replied in a calm tone of voice: "I understand why you are angry, Baldwin. You are always so when you are wrong, and feel your own wrong."

"My own wrong?"

"My dear Baldwin, moderate yourself! What we have to discuss can just as well be done in peace. You are tired of me—I have noticed that for some time already. You like to play with love, but not with serious, earnest love, because you love no one seriously but yourself. You treat me badly, hoping that thus I also will tire of you; and if I must confess the truth, your remedy has had the desired effect. I am tired of you!"

"Only one little question," he said after a short pause, "have you formed a love-affair with this young prince?"

She was standing on the opposite side of the table, and raising herself to her full height, and with a sharp, dagger-like look, she said, "Yes!"

"And you are not ashamed to say that to my face?"

"No!"

In the consciousness that now at last the great moment, so long hoped for and yet so greatly dreaded, had

come, a bodily pain seized his heavily-laboring brains. Would she again call him back? He hoped she would, but his mind was made up. He stood immovable for a moment—then he seized his hat, bowed, and went to the door.

This time she did not follow him.

When his steps were heard no longer, she lay down, drew the little stand nearer to her, poured out a tiny cup of her strong tea, and took up Nana, which the prince had given her as the last news from the great capital of the world.

But her mind refused to follow the eye, as it ran over line after line. A smile of victorious joy illumined her face. Doctor Comet, in the meantime, walked through the cool, windy streets towards his house, and the farther he removed himself from Lily's house, the freer he felt and the lighter was his heart.

He could hardly comprehend why he had so long postponed this blissful act, this health-bringing operation! Although no words had been spoken, he felt quite sure of having broken the bridges behind him—a raging torrent of unpardonable insults parted them forever! He complimented himself on his diplomatic prowess. "It is really remarkable," he said to himself, "how easily I can dissolve difficult and intricate combinations, when I once make up my mind. In this state of beatitude he reached home, where his family, reinforced by one of his sons-in-law and his wife, were just sitting down to supper. They were greatly astonished to see him at this hour, as he was generally so constantly absorbed in business of the very highest importance that he but very rarely took his meals at home. They were glad, besides, to find him unusually cheerful. He was in good humor, quite talkative, made jokes, laughed aloud, and actually honored Rachel with a caress, patting her shoulder with the tips

of two fingers, so that she came near dropping a plate from sheer astonishment.

He slept admirably all night through, arose quite early, breakfasted with his wife and Sylvia, patiently listening to Rachel's pious wishes and admonitions concerning the impending decease of Uncle Liondell, and then drove to the Ministry. From there he went to his Bank, where his magnificently furnished apartments were already occupied by a numerous deputation. They were sent to him by a mass meeting, to present to him an address in which seventy of the most eminent men of the city, statesmen, scholars, merchants, and other leading members of his party, assured him of their admiration, and expressed their indignation at the mean and contemptible measures adopted by his political adversaries.

Mr. Comet requested the deputation to express his hearty thanks to all the members who had signed the paper, appealed to them to bear him witness that all his efforts on earth had had but one aim—the well-being of the first of all nations—and then invited the deputation, as well as all the signers of the document, to a great banquet at the famous hotel "The Emperor's Court."

He was in excellent humor. His position seemed to be more firmly established than ever. Two editors, who had made it their special aim to attack his financial operations, were now in prison paying the penalty for slanderous libel, and the deputation which he had just now received testified to the high esteem in which he was held by the world.

He signed the papers which his secretaries had prepared for him, took, when this was done, a light lunch, with a pint of Burgundy, and lay down on a sofa to divert his mind by reading the *Memoirs of Casanova*.

But the book had lost its interest to-day. He let it drop soon, and meditated once more on the happy rid-

dance of that dangerous woman. Still, he could not think of the last scene in the drama without recalling very forcibly the strange but irresistible beauty of that wonderful woman. How she stood there before him, so calm, so scornful and withal so beautiful! Why should she have let him go so easily? Had she really never loved him in earnest? Had he been merely one of many purses to be drained for her selfish purposes? That thought was too irritating—it made him jump up, and walk up and down in the room with passionate steps. Did she really love that prince? Impossible! Her heart was the extinct crater of a volcano. And even if she did, what was it to him now?—nothing!

In the richly-carved ebony secretary of his private room in the Bank building, he kept, in a secret compartment, his correspondence with Lily. He opened the drawer, pressed the springs, and took out the letters. There were over a hundred there, many torn, many read to pieces, witnesses of violent scenes and passionate excitement. Should he burn them? What was that? Oh, a photograph, taken when she was twenty. He gazed at it thoughtfully.

“What a charming creature she was!” he thought. “I certainly was lucky to call her mine! There is something irresistibly attractive, something wonderfully piquant in her whole being, that I never saw in any other woman. I remember the time when to think of her made my blood boil, and my senses whirl around; when I discerned her peculiar coiffure out of hundreds in a concert-room, at any ball, ah! then I realized the poet’s fiction that her love was my world.”

He took a later likeness and compared the two.

“One could not say that she had lost anything, and still she is no longer the same. A young man might have preferred that slender figure—I like this matured

roundness better. But these eyes! Oh, these eyes! What a strange mixture of unbridled audacity and bashful reserve dwells there behind those unfathomable eyes!"

Just then some one knocked. A servant entered and brought notice that in the evening a meeting of the Cabinet would be held to consult on some important question about the taxation of real estate. Mr. Comet uttered a curse against real estate.

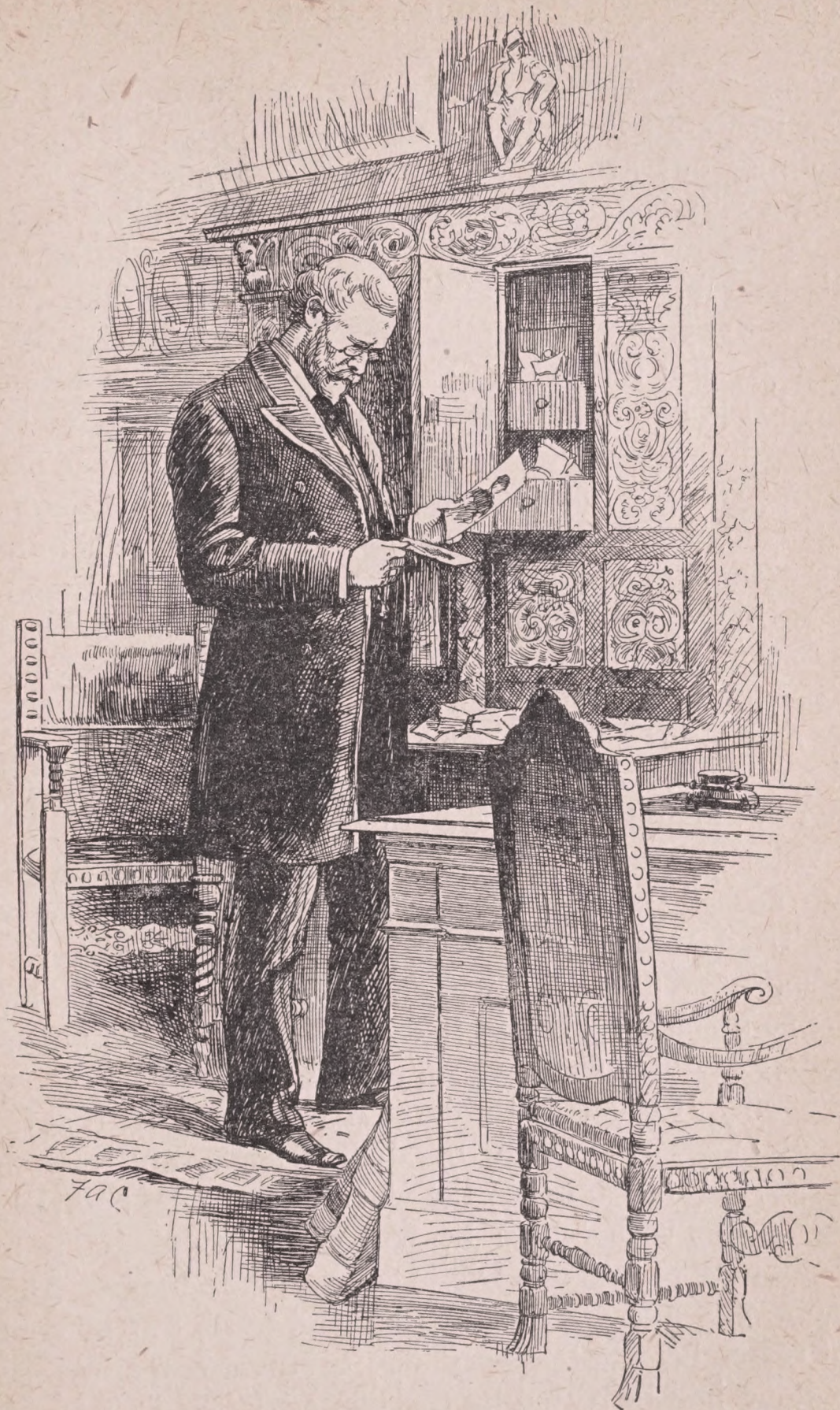
"If this woman had a different temper, if she were as gentle as she is fair, if she were soft and still and yielding, instead of harboring a demon in her bosom, I might have kept her. But then—I should have long since tired of her no doubt! This is a queer world in which it seems very hard to find out what we want!"

He took a handful of old crushed letters from the secret drawer and glanced over them.

A gentle fragrance exhaled from the notes, ribbons, dry flowers and other trifles that were contained in many letters, which strangely contrasted with the stern and strict business character of the place. This perfume recalled to Comet the memories of long-past years, and plunged him into strange dreams. Once more the same perfume arose from the dark, entangled hair that cooled his brow, which leant against a soft, white shoulder, while a tender hand was caressing him; a deep, vibrating voice resounded in his ear, and between the soft, sweet words, he heard the melodies of long-forgotten dances, that magically reminded him of the days of his youth. He read two or three of the letters. They made a painful impression upon him.

He closed the drawer and walked up and down again.

"Many people," he soliloquized, "never think of love, and especially at my age; the care of children, the profession and their daily comfort, are all that troubles men.



HE TOOK A LATER LIKENESS AND COMPARED THE TWO.—See Page 175.

There is my friend Hagen; he would declare I was insane were I to pour out my heart to him. He knows nothing but his law papers, good eating and drinking and a soft bed. He works all day long and at night I dare say he dreams of his law-suits. Pen and ink are his heaven. I believe in the whole Imperial Diet there are not twenty of my colleagues who are still capable of loving. But they are dry and dull fellows with whom I would not like to exchange. I—I have always found love as necessary to me as air to breathe. I shall have hereafter to content myself with the colder but less dangerous enjoyments of honors and of wealth. There is a time for everything! There is a time for love and a time for hate—there is a time for life, and there is—no! hold on! is there a time for dying? And yet, why do we so often speak of death, and yet think so rarely of death when we are alone? We feel—we know—that it must come, but does any one of us busy, active men ever realize that in the midst of life we are in death?"

What was this? Like an electric spark it all of a sudden flashed through his mind that he was a bad man! He tried to laugh at himself for harboring such a thought. What! He who had done such great things and so much good? But it was an evil hour. Again and again a doubt sprang up in his heart. Was he really a bad man? It occurred to him to have heard once that bad people were recognized by their friends, and now he passed, in feverish haste, the whole list of men before his mind's eye, with whom he had come in contact in his life, hoping to find one whom he had made happy. Alas! There was not one! He tried and tried, but he could not remember one! Every one of them had suffered—he alone had benefited by the contact! Had he not often boasted, had he not made it the glory of his life, that

he was unsurpassed in the great Empire as an excellent, a superior man of business? And what did that mean, but that in every business transaction the advantage had been on his side? How he now sighed to recall one occasion where he had succumbed! And when he next turned from business to friendship—alas! the result was the same. Not that he had not procured for one a good place, for another pecuniary advantages, but he had to confess that it had always been for a consideration. And what was worse, every one whom he had thus benefited, seemed to have deteriorated afterwards, was demoralized or had disappeared. He had used them and then thrown the empty shells away!

With increasing tremor he discovered that he had injured those most grievously who had stood nearest to him. Either he had poisoned their mind by loose principles, or he had made them unhappy like his wife. At last Lily appeared. He breathed more freely, for he had not corrupted her, at least. She had been a refined coquette when he had learnt to know her. This thought roused him from his gruesome brooding, he tried to shake off the sickly feelings that had taken possession of him, and he ascribed his prostration now to the shock he had received yesterday.

“I do not make myself out better than I am, but there is no need, either, to paint myself worse than I am. The worst that can be laid to my charge is that I have no fixed principles, I am a perfect chameleon; to-day I think so, to-morrow very differently. But people who are always of the same opinion are very generally donkeys, while clever people change as prudence commands. Besides, I did not make myself. My brother-in-law, Ephraim, who is a great scientist and an eminently learned man, once proved to my satisfaction that a man's character is bestowed upon him at his birth in the shape of his brains.

Evidently the organ of idealism was in me very strongly developed, and that of firmness very imperfectly."

Mr. Comet sent for a carriage, drove an hour or two about in the park, changed his dress, dined with the Minister of Finance, and at night delivered a magnificent speech on the taxation of real estate.

It was nine o'clock when he drove home, and instinctively he seized the string fastened to his coachman's arm, and stopped at a certain corner of the street, where he used to alight at this hour in order to call on Lily. But he let the string go. "No," he said to himself, and drove home. But he was pursued by a melancholy pain in his heart—it was a kind of homesickness.

On the table in his Bureau he found, as usual, a large number of letters, which he opened and read. But once more he caught himself not reading at all, but standing in Lily's room, and seeing her in the arms of the prince. He jumped up and restlessly walked up and down. Suddenly he became aware that he was still in evening costume. He went into another room to change his dress. He took a more comfortable house-coat from his wardrobe and was on the point of putting it on when something bright arrested his looks.

A wave of hot blood rose to his head. It was a hair that was hanging on the collar of his coat. He looked at it. It was bright like polished bronze, and could belong only to one head on God's earth, and that head had rested but day before yesterday on his breast!

"Great Heavens!" he cried, "I have not overcome it yet! The old chains and fetters hold me still!"

Lily's slender and yet luscious form, her elastic, elegant movements, the deep, sweet tone of her voice,—all this appeared of a sudden once more before his mind's eye, and with it that hated prince.

"I must!" he said to himself in a low whisper, "I

must succumb! My God! My God! She has driven the arrow too deep into my heart! I shall bleed to death."

He remembered having read in his childhood something of a woman and a tent-hammer—or was it an arrow? It seemed to him it was somewhere in the Bible. He thought he would look up the place, and went to his bookcases. A Bible! There was no Bible there! He rang the bell.

"Bring me a Bible!" he said to the servant. "Go to my wife."

"My mistress says she has no Bible," was the answer with which the servant returned after a prolonged absence.

He went across where Sylvia and Rachel were sitting at work. "What do you want with a Bible?" asked Sylvia. She as well as her mother was astonished to see him at home, and still more so at his curious question.

"I wanted to look up something," he said.

Sylvia got up. "I have a little Bible here," she said. Mr. Comet took the book from her hand and opened it.

"*La Sainte Bible*," he read. "Why, this is a French Bible!"

"Yes, I use it sometimes to refresh my French in it," she answered.

Mr. Comet threw the book on the floor so violently that Mrs. Rachel started up, frightened, and Sylvia gazed at him in amazement.

"And this is the only copy of the Bible in our house?" he asked, savagely. "The book of all books does not exist here in a decent and legible shape! May God—"

"But, husband," interrupted Rachel, to stop the curse that was coming, "are you entirely beside yourself? As long as I know you, you have never asked for the book. Not a single time."

“So much the worse !” he cried. “It is a scandal and a sin that I have not done so. Is this a christian house? But it is your fault, you spectre of my life.”

He went out, slamming the door, and his steps gradually passed away. “What does he mean by spectre?” asked Mrs. Rachel. “What is a spectre? Sylvia, am I a spectre?”

Sylvia shrugged her shoulders.

“I have always told you, mother, that you do not know how to take papa.”

Rachel burst into tears. She had never in her life felt so unhappy. “Oh,” she sobbed, “when I think that I have been keeping your father’s house now for thirty years, that I have saved him ever so many dollars, and have always been a faithful wife to him—then surely it is hard to be called a spectre. And only yesterday he was so kind !”

Mrs. Rachel had a tender heart and no longer felt the desire to fight as in former years. Her health was bad ; she was falling off, and had frequent violent headaches, and her complexion looked bluish and yellow at the same time.

Sylvia, however, was almost as much struck by her father’s strange conduct. For years no such scene had taken place in the house. Her father, if at all at home and thinking of domestic affairs, had at best an ironical smile for them, and then left the ladies without saying another word.

Mr. Comet was in the meantime sitting once more in his Bureau, and had utterly forgotten wife and child. He fell again into the same melancholy brooding that seemed to-day to have irrepressible charms for him. “Shall I go back to her?” he asked himself again and again. “And will she receive you? She is so cunning—a very serpent in cunning! If she sees that I cannot

do without her, I am lost. She is possessed by Satan. She will read me at a glance, like an open book. And she will tell me what I hardly dare confess myself! She is too shrewd! How often did she know what I was thinking of, as if she could read my thoughts through my brow as clearly as if they were written there in flaming letters! Yes, if I go back to her I am lost. She sees instantly that I cannot live without her, and if she sees it she will give me a ride worse than Mazeppa's ride in the Polish steppes. She is not made of flesh and blood—she is a hellish compound of all the passions of man in a beautiful, seductive mask! Oh that form! those eyes! those lips! that hair!”

CHAPTER XVII.

A LONGING SOUL.

Ephraim was happier in Heidelberg than he had been for many years. He grew stout, and his complexion was healthy and ruddy. News from home no longer interested him—even the possible inheritance, after the death of his cousin Amadeus, occupied his thoughts but little. He had for some time intended to go to fair Flora's father and to ask him for her hand, for he understood this much at least that it was customary and proper to marry a girl whom he had kissed and loved so long. He was only kept from doing it by some scruples he had whether the marriage ceremony of present churches fulfilled the intentions of the founder? There are so many objections to marriage, he said, that it is

all-important to consult the best authorities on the subject before venturing upon married life.

At the same time it so happened that he had made the acquaintance of a young lady who lived in the same house in a room opposite to his, and who had, perhaps not quite unintentionally, such observations on marriage as confirmed him in his purpose, first to study the subject very thoroughly. This young lady was an actress, and somewhat older than Ephraim, but she looked up to him as to her father or elder brother, as one would conclude, at least, from the simple, honest manner of her daily visits to his rooms. The acquaintance had begun by means of a white powder, which good Ephraim had several times found on books left over night on the window-sill, and which had evidently blown in through the open window. He consulted on this subject the girl who attended to his room. One morning his inquiries procured him a visit from the actress. She told him that she played certain parts which required powder, and as she did not own a white wig, she had been in the habit of powdering her own hair. Then, at night, after the play was over, she would hold her head outside the open window and shake the powder out of her hair again. Some must have flown into Ephraim's open window.

The actress had such perfectly natural and unreserved ways that Ephraim was delighted, and when he noticed how amazingly ignorant she was on the subject of dramatic art, and how admirably she played notwithstanding, and how bright she was by nature, he was all the better pleased with her, and consulted her on matters grave and matters small. If he had followed her advice he would have given up all idea of ever getting married, but Ephraim was very much in earnest. He searched the Old and the New Testament, and read all he could find as to the relations between Man and Wife. Perusing

for that purpose the very important first chapter of the Epistle to the Corinthians, he happened to read, "Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake." "Strange!" he said to himself, "strange, that a holy man should make such a demand! Generally, congregations are bold enough in eating, and do not require being encouraged."

Ephraim meditated, and came to the conclusion that he ought to compare the original, the Greek text. He was as thorough as a professor of history.

"Since you wish to compare different versions," said the obliging librarian, "I recommend to you this small work by a practising physician, which has created a great sensation." Ephraim took the little book and found that the author believed Jesus had been a member of the sect of the Essenes, who ate no meat, swore no oaths, rejected therefore, matrimony, and made it their vocation in life to heal the sick in Judea, the Pharisees and Sadducees.

"That is nothing new!" said Ephraim, when he had devoured the work in one short evening. "Frederick the Great entertained the same view, although he was no theologian. The celibacy of the Catholic Church is, after all, a thoroughly christian and sacred institution."

But he read again, and he now noticed, what had escaped him before, how the author in the end declared that after all the matter was purposely left undecided by the Apostle, who did not wish to coerce the free will of man in the least, but especially not in the question of matrimony. He opened the window, and heard from the house opposite, where also the windows were left open, Weber's "Invitation to the waltz," which his friend was playing. Ephraim listened a moment and then laughed heartily.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MAID OF CORINTH.

Flora and her family did all they could to make life easy for Ephraim ; they were perfectly at home with him and in him. They practised the maxim of English hosts, to leave their guests perfectly free to do and not to do what they choose, although they had never been in England. They lived as they had always lived, they ate what they had eaten before, and drank the same beer, the same wine, and never minded in the least whether Ephraim was present or not.

He was very often present. From the hour of noon he was ever welcome. In the morning he worked, and then Flora also was busily engaged and did not like to be interrupted. She kept house and provided dinner. After that she dressed and was very pretty to look at. At times Ephraim went across to dinner. It consisted of very simple dishes, pancakes and potatoes being prominent, but on Sundays always a dish of roast meat and a bottle of wine. The cousins sent fresh fruit from their garden every day. Ephraim enjoyed these primitive dishes, prepared by Flora's skilful hand. After dinner they had coffee. Never in his life had Ephraim drunk such innocent coffee ; he was quite sure that it would never keep him awake if he were to drink gallons. The supper was a reduced copy of dinner. If Torquato Tasso had boarded at this house, instead of the court of the Dukes of Ferrara, Ephraim assured himself he would certainly never have suffered from surfeit, nor would Antonia have been allowed to tell him that spices, sweet things, and strong beverages, hastily swallowed, had

spoilt his blood by heating and troubled his mind's clear vision.

The father, as well as Adolf, disappeared soon after supper and went to their restaurant, where they spent every evening of the year. Then began sweet hours for Flora and Ephraim. Often they sat in the gloaming at the window behind the fragrant wall flowers; often also, escorted by mamma or the young cousins, they strolled along the banks of the Neckar, if they did not extend their walk up to the old romantic castle. Ephraim's greatest enjoyment, however, was to listen to Flora's songs, accompanied by her brother on the piano. He had discovered that his love had a really fine voice and his delight knew no end.

“Certainly,” he said to her once in his admiration, “if the gods wish to bestow their last and greatest favor upon a human being whom they love, they give him a fine voice, for Music is beyond doubt the language of all heavenly beings, and by it man raises himself on light wings to their throne on high!”

The thought that such intimacy between these two young people might end disastrously, seemed never to have occurred to either of the two families. No member ever noticed or made any remark on this so-called friendship between Ephraim and Flora. Such freedom from care and anxiety, such perfect peace and repose, such absolute trust and confidence in the two young people, struck Ephraim very forcibly, and corrected many views of life which he had formerly entertained. He could not conceal it from his own eyes that these simple, kind-hearted and contented people displayed almost perpetual cheerfulness, and that they almost unconsciously enjoyed in their own, simple ways, those greatest gifts that fall to the lot of man, and after which so many men aspire with almost desperate efforts. At times he had

tried to converse with them on such subjects as interested him most deeply. They listened politely to his ideas of the aim of creation, or the contrast between idealism and materialism, but they did not continue the discussion. Their idea was that a man must learn something that will provide his daily bread, but to go beyond that was to them the beginning of vagary.

Ephraim spoke occasionally of such things as form, for the majority of men, the end and aim of all their efforts, of colossal wealth, of literary fame, of political eminence, of life at the Imperial Court. They listened again politely, but he saw that he made no impression. They read no newspapers, save a little, local sheet with all the births, marriages and deaths; they did not even dream of eminence in Arts or Sciences, and the Court of the Emperor was no nearer to them than Sirius or Jupiter. They liked a cosy little chat about things of which they could judge, say of Aunt Ellen's new bonnet, or the wine they had laid in for the coming winter, or the last engagement that had been such a surprise!

Ephraim came to the conviction that in Berlin—and perhaps in some other great cities on earth—many things were held to be necessary, which, after all, were not indispensable for happiness; and when he heard that aside from a cold, which papa had caught twelve years ago, after trying the new wine and spending the night absorbed in deep thought, in the open air, no one could remember a case of sickness in the family, he began here also to modify his views.

Such discoveries gave Ephraim great pleasure; he felt, in the bosom of this happy family, as if he were at a sanitarium, at a climatic "Kurort," but he also knew that his circumstances would not allow him to remain here forever.

Thus the European nabob enjoys it hugely to breathe

really pure air in Egypt, to bask in a light which beautifies even huts of baked clay, and to ride across the desert in company with black goblins, but he knows he will not forever remain in this new world, and will have to return to laced women, soot-blackened buildings and the friction of rail and paving-stone. Only in moments of utter forgetfulness can he feel perfectly happy between the pyramids and the Nile.

Thus Ephraim also could forget, only in hours when he went as it were entirely out of himself, that there are occupations which men honor with the name of Sciences, that he himself had been destined to plough, not Mother Earth, but the fruitful fields of Science, and that his whole youth had been too thoroughly imbued with notions of fame and honor to rest forever with this happy family.

What would his Mother Clara have said to a daughter-in-law whose hair was so golden, whose bosom so round, whose foot so nimble, and whose culture was so imperfect? To a daughter who could handle the broom and govern the pot, but who knew nothing of Egyptian king's daughters, who had not read the Song of Roland, and who could not solve the enigmas in Spielhagen's "Problematic Characters?"

Although he respected Mother Clara's opinions, and in truth and reality was Mother Clara's son, he was not utterly dismayed by these thoughts. He had, at school, already shown himself to be an exceptional pupil, in as much as in studying the classic authors he had not been content with the grammar rules, but had asserted that there was actually some sense also in these writings. At a later period he carried his eccentricity so far that he actually thought, in determining his way in life, more of what an Aristotle, a Locke or a Kant held, than what the good neighbors and kind gossips had to say. Thus

it came about that when he had to face the question of betrothal and marriage, the most important crisis in his life, he actually sought help and counsel, not with men, but with Holy Writ.

Here he was confronted on one side by the Greek text of the New Testament, while on the other side his close observation of Flora and her family led him to the conviction that it was certainly better, without a wife to belong to the living, than with a wife to the dead, as the Essenes maintained when they taught their doctrine of Celibacy.

Flora, moreover, seemed to meet him with the same view. At least he never discovered in her the slightest trace of a wish to be betrothed—the thought of marrying apparently had never yet occurred to her. She was probably too sound, too hearty and simple, to think that love ought to be accorded only when the purchase money was lying on the table. She had certainly never looked upon kisses as bait to catch a provision for life. Her only idea of love and of kisses was evidently that they were charming, that there was in fact nothing sweeter and dearer in life than to love and to kiss. She had evidently been so badly brought up that she openly revealed the impulses of her heart, instead of secretly weaving them into a net in which to catch a lover—at least so thought Ephraim.

The parents and relatives also apparently did not care what was going on. They lived in harmless security, and thought, perhaps, in their touching modesty, that lovers must themselves know best what was good for them, and ought not, without urgent necessity, to be suddenly arrested and chained to each other with manacles—so thought Ephraim. Never had a sky so blue and clear of clouds beamed down upon the happy man. He hung on the words of the wise men of antiquity, and on Flora's

lips—the wisdom of India raised his head to heaven, soft arms held him back on earth.

It was so pleasant in the morning in this sunny, cheery room, that looked out upon the old, rickety, carved bow-window opposite, to read in old books, and to think all the time how the evening would bring what all their wisdom could not procure. It was so pleasant to hear the dainty step of the actress approach, who came with her bright, eager eyes to try and catch a little speech on Molière or Shakespeare, or to arrange an outing for the evening if she did not play that night. It was so pleasant to hear the sound of Adolf's piano that summoned him to come across and to spend the evening in sweet converse with his beloved!

Flora was born for love, and as the fish splashes and swims merrily and pleasantly in his element, she also swam, as it were happily, in the element of the Cyprian Goddess. She was every day new and fresh; only in her affectionate tenderness she was ever the old one. She knew how to give a new and attractive turn to every meeting, to every agreement for another meeting. With the actress also she had readily made friends, and again and again the merry company would walk out to the old castle, drink and chat and sing under the tall old trees, till the stars above in the dark blue sky would shine brightly, and the little lights below in the valley go out one by one.

Thus one day passed after another, one month followed another, and summer was verging into Autumn. Then Ephraim began to feel that earth-born happiness is after all but ephemeral.

He had one morning, with his almost over-refined perception, noticed a trifle, a mere trifle, which still rankled in his mind. Flora had, while he kissed her, fastened a

bow to her throat. They had been standing in the bow-window, behind the flowers ; he held her embraced, her golden hair touched his cheek, his heart was drunk with bliss—when she took a piece of blue ribbon from the table and calmly fastened it carefully during the kiss.

He was not quite so merry, quite so cheerful that evening—and yet he could not say why.

Next morning a little incident happened with the step-daughter of his landlord. This man, a respectable and universally esteemed citizen, and an excellent singer in church, though a little given to drinking, was her guardian, and in that capacity drew an income of fifty dollars. He and his wife saw that they would lose this money if the girl ever married, and had therefore opposed her betrothal to a young merchant. This had led to the sad result that the man had seduced the girl and fled to America.

With hot tears the poor child confessed her sin to Ephraim when he asked her why she had been weeping so grievously, as her face showed? Ephraim was deeply interested in the girl, and resolved to intercede in her behalf with the old people. But what struck him forcibly was this, that the girl did not blame her faithless, cowardly lover at all, but that her love seemed only to be the stronger for his wickedness.

He discussed the case with his friend the actress, but she made such a face, and her eyes sparkled with such cunning humor, that Ephraim understood her meaning and was silent.

He drew, however, a lesson from the incident. He told himself, for the first time clearly, that Flora's love might very well slip away from him one of these days, and he would not be able to keep it from disappearing. It was not given to him to keep Flora's affection in such con-

stant excitement as a girl of her nature required, as it would have been necessary to be quite sure of a Maid of Corinth—as he called Flora in his heart.

CHAPTER XIX.

INTO THE ABYSS.

The summer that brought Ephraim in Heidelberg nothing but love and philosophy, brought to Alfonse in Berlin dark thoughts and sombre reflections. He could not get over the loss of the singer, and hated the prince with burning rage, constantly brooding over the secret which, he thought, could alone explain the strange union between these two beings that were so unlike to each other. He gradually convinced himself that there must be a secret bond which united the Liondell family and the Spanish woman, and that this alone could have induced the prince to overcome all the prejudices of his caste. Surely, under no other circumstances, could the prince have decided to marry the stage-princess, whom, before, he had never treated otherwise than with ironical courtesy and a kind of mocking respect, and whom he had apparently noticed only because she was the fashion and he wanted amusement. He was convinced that something very strange must have occurred to explain so remarkable a change.

And again and again his mind reverted to that remarkable scene at the Alliance Club, when the Arab charged her publicly with robbery, when his cousin Amadeus had shown such a strange interest in the judicial inquiry, and

the reticence of the Spanish woman as to her family and her childhood. He now remembered having heard that one of the old baron's brothers had been murdered on the island of Cuba with his whole family, a fact which his mother averred to have known for years, and lastly he recalled the striking likeness which the artist bore to his unfortunate cousin.

All these circumstances put together enabled him pretty nearly to guess the actual truth; he thereupon called on the lawyer who had defended the artist, and from him obtained the certainty that she was a Liondell. The lawyer, however, repeated that the lady herself emphatically denied to be in any manner related to that family. This was enough for him, and he now set to work with the aid of his mother to ascertain how far this might affect their prospects when the old baron should depart this life.

Mrs. Clara was terribly excited when he explained the matter to her; she and her sister-in-law, Mrs. Rachel, had overwhelmed poor Uncle Liondell with expressions of their profound sympathy, hoping thus to strengthen the bonds of kinship for future emergencies. The old baron, however, had received their condolence very coolly; he seemed actually to dislike being reminded of his affliction,—he did not hesitate to let them see this. “You can go away now, Sister Rachel, and you can go, too, Clara,” he once said, when the two affectionate creatures assured him that they would never, never leave him alone in his great sorrow. He treated his relatives with a kind of gentle brutality, which did not allow them the slightest hope of benefiting by his death. This had naturally also prevented Mrs. Clara from asking for the two thousand dollars with which to pay Alfonse's debts. When she now heard that the famous singer had met the old gentleman once or twice, she was furious, and only calmed

down when she was told that the artist had left for Paris.

But this consolation also was only momentary, for soon it became known that Prince Lignac had followed her, and next the newspapers teemed with notices of the brilliant wedding that had taken place at the Madeline, uniting Prince Lignac and the far-famed artist Chessa de Molini. Among the by-standers a number of princes and dukes, of counts and barons, were mentioned, but also names like Rothschild, Seligman, Landauer, etc., who warranted the prince's connection with the leading financial houses of Europe. The bride had worn white silk, suffused with a faint, rosy sheen, imitating the delicate pinkish petals of unfolding rosebuds; laces of great age and fabulous value had adorned her costume, which was completed by a dainty wreath of orange blossoms and diamonds, from which a most exquisite, perfectly transparent veil hung down to the ground. This article, not pleasant to read for Alfonse, was promptly followed by one still less pleasant. It stated that the prince was negotiating with the Imperial Government for the privilege of making his German estates a strictly entailed property, for which purpose twenty-five millions had been invested in land, so as to erect the new principality of Lissa on a truly imposing scale. This estate, to be known as the Lissa Estate, was hereafter to devolve always upon the second son of the head of the house, who remained himself as Prince Lignac, in possession of all the territory now owned by that family in Normandy and Little Brittany. The present prince would, moreover, endow and assume a third title of his house, a Barony Liondell, bearing this name in agreement with the head of the famous banking-house of that name, who endowed it now with a sum to be specified at his demise.

Alfonse read these lines with rage in his heart ; his mother and Mrs. Comet broke out in furious denunciations of the wicked old man, amid torrents of tears, and curses loud and fierce. They saw clearly that the two families of Comet and Steelyard were to be disinherited for the benefit of this vagabond niece.

“ He has lost his senses !” cried Mrs. Clara. “ To give everything to the man who was the cause of his son’s death ! Who knows but it was all a conspiracy, and the prince only made him buy that beast in order to get him out of the way ? And the old fool does not see that ! And he forgets his legitimate heirs, his own kinsmen, who helped him when he was starving, and thus laid the foundation to his present enormous wealth ! But—God will punish him ! I am sure !”

“ Is that really so ?” asked Alfonse, for the hundredth time, looking dark and dismal.

“ I will die if it is not so !” cried his mother. “ Simon’s father was a poor Jew, who went about in the villages, a stick in his hand and a bag on his shoulders, peddling. Simon himself commenced with ten dollars fifty-four years ago, and had to fail three times before he could establish a bank of his own.”

Mrs. Rachel confirmed the statement. She was probably most severely hurt by the discovery, for she had most confidently built upon the hope of an inheritance. Alfonse soon received another blow. He was notified that after the lapse of the regular term, he would be ordered back to his regiment in a remote province.

Three days he spent in brooding over this new calamity, and then he sent in his resignation, and told his father that he was ready to go to London. His mother was terribly distressed, and at least prevailed upon him not to leave Berlin for awhile. He had formed a plan of **his own.**

He spent much of his time at the banker's villa, trying to amuse him by light, entertaining talk, such as he possessed in a high degree. The old gentleman had always rather had a liking for the clever, handsome kinsman, and had frequently shown him some preference, although Amadeus had prevented a closer intercourse. Now he took some interest in Alfonse's plans, was pleased with his intention to become a business man, and promised him letters for London. Prince Lignac and Chessa were purposely never mentioned by Alfonse.

One evening in September Alfonse packed a small valise with the most necessary things, sent it, unknown to his parents, to the Western Railway station, put his revolver into his breast-pocket, and drove out to the villa. He expected to find the old banker, as usual, in the little Bureau which he had caused to be fitted up for himself in the second story, and where he felt more comfortable than in the gorgeously-adorned room down-stairs.

The servants, who knew him, showed him up at once, and he entered the room, where he found the old man sitting at his writing-table and looking at him surprised at a visit at so late an hour.

Alfonse hesitated a moment at the door ; his heart was beating so violently he could hardly breathe. His eyes were swimming ; he saw nothing distinctly, not even the old man who had ever been so kind to him, and whom he now meant. He begged to be excused for coming at this unsuitable hour, and then sat down close before the banker, thus barring any escape for the latter.

"I came so late," he said, speaking with a thick, trembling voice, "because I wanted to find you alone, for I have a very serious matter to discuss."

The tone of his voice was strangely hoarse, and his eyes shone with an uncanny fire, so that the old baron began to feel very uncomfortable, and looked hard at the young

man. He pushed back his chair, trying instinctively to get free, but Alfonse firmly seized his hand and requested him to sit still and listen to him.

The banker obeyed, for a sudden, great fear fell upon him. His imagination ran riot among a number of terrible scenes in which rich men had been surprised in some such way as this, and exposed to terrible danger. He saw that Alfonse was not himself, but seemed to be under the control of some foreign influence, which had seized him and now drove him on to some desperate measure.

“What do you want?” he asked, trying to appear calm, although he was conscious that the blood receded from his cheeks and that his knees were trembling.

“All the papers bring the report,” began Alfonse, looking fixedly at the banker, and feeling that the first step being taken, he had no choice now but must go on, “that Prince Lignac has married the public singer, Chessa de Molini, and that he has, with your consent and your assistance, established an immense entailed estate. Am I right in supposing that this public singer is your niece, Benjamin’s daughter? And that you are going to make, or have already made her, the only heir to your entire fortune?”

“What is that to you? How dare you hold me to account?” the banker boldly exclaimed, anger and fear competing in him for the supremacy. He was in a state of great excitement, his lips trembling, and his hands seeking now here, now there, to grasp a knife—or what not.

“That is very much to me!” was Alfonse’s calm answer, “and I think I have the right to hold you to account for it. And if I should not have the right, I would dare take it. My family has the first claim upon you, and of my family myself. I am excessively sorry to have to say so, but I am in a desperate condition; I cannot help myself in any

other way. I ask in all humility and modesty. There is a knife at my throat! You are my last sheet-anchor!"

The banker rose and stretched out his hand for the bell, but Alfonse seized him and pressed him back again into his chair. Then he continued:

"Let us discuss this quietly! No one will interrupt us here and now! You see, honored uncle and baron, you are a millionaire many times over—I am a poor devil, and worse than poor, since I am terribly in debt. It is very unpleasant to me to know that all this pretty money is to go to a strange prince, especially when I remember that it was my family who gave you, first of all, means to start in life, and that you have never returned the money which you thus borrowed."

"That is a lie!" cried the man. "I have let you have ten-times as much as old Ephraim ever advanced me."

He gathered some courage when he heard the young man talk reasonably, and he no longer feared that he was drunk or insane, as he had fancied for a moment.

"Even if that were so," continued the young man, "it would be utterly out of proportion to the millions which you now possess, and which you would not possess if my grandfather had not helped you."

"Who says so? who can know that?" cried the baron. "Industrious hands and able thoughts always make money."

"Never mind that now! The question is simply this: Have you really transferred your whole fortune to this woman?"

"That is nobody's business!" replied the banker.

"Very well, then—I thought so," said Alfonse, calmly drawing his revolver from his pocket. He then laid it on his knee, drawing the cock to its first rest.

A terrible fright befell the poor old man at the click of the weapon. He turned deadly pale, his lips were blue,

and his arms fell helpless down at his sides. He firmly believed that his last hour had come, and deep night fell upon his senses.

The sight of this despair was so pitiful that Alfonse felt compassion, and almost inclined to ask the poor old man's forgiveness, to pocket the revolver and to run away. But the idea of making himself ridiculous and of giving way at the very moment of success, soon got the better of his impulses—he clenched his teeth and said :

“You need not be afraid—this weapon is not intended for you !”

The old man turned his lack-lustre eyes upon him, and began to breathe once more.

“This six-barreled revolver,” said the young man, raising the weapon and turning the barrels, “is my last resource if you forsake me. I want money, and I beg you will pay it to me as part of my future inheritance. If you refuse, I shall kill myself here, before your eyes, and then you will be sorry to have been so hard-hearted !”

In the flood of thoughts which filled the old man's brains at this moment, one was supreme : What could he do to make Alfonse choose another place where he might kill himself ? All kinds of possible and impossible stories of pistols going off at the right moment or at the wrong—which was it ?—chased each other, and the mere thought that such a murderous weapon might be discharged here in his presence, was unspeakable horror to his feeble mind. He fancied he felt some little cold thing boring its way into his head or into his chest—perhaps right into his heart—who could tell ? and now, did he not see that fearful weapon there right before him ? Suppose it were to go off now ? Where would the ball lodge ?

“How much money do you want ?” he at last found breath to ask.

“Enough to secure me a pleasant, easy life. The amount I leave to your generosity, but I shall want at the very least fifty thousand dollars.”

The banker looked at him dumbfounded. “The man must be insane, after all!” he thought. “He cannot be in earnest—he only wants to frighten me!”

“Alfonse!” he exclaimed, indignantly, and making a last effort, “leave me; shame upon your unworthy conduct!”

But the man only raised the revolver, and showed in his features such savage resolution, that the baron saw, beyond all doubt, he was in earnest.

“Stop!” he cried. “You shall have the money.”

He moved aside some papers, but his hands trembled so he could not find what he wanted.

“A vast sum!” he stammered.

“Very small for a fortune of twenty millions, I should think,” replied Alfonse very quietly.

The old man cast a look at Alfonse which remained forever engraven on his memory as a terrific image, so fearfully were wrath and terror mingled there.

It was a terrible scene for Alfonse, as he sat there in silence and watched the old man, with his feeble sight, and weak, trembling hands, trying to endorse bills of exchange and to sign cheques. He saw himself triumphing over his adversaries, amply provided for all time to come, and no one the wiser for it, and victory in the near future—and yet he felt the most wretched man on earth. He tried to look at the old man’s face—he could not do it. There was a higher power over him that made him blush as he heard the pen scratch the stiff paper; and when the old man, having replaced his cheque books, turned the key in the lock of the drawer, he actually started.

He hastily grasped the precious, flimsy little papers,

crushed them into his pocket-book, turned away from the pitiful sight of the poor old man, who had sunk down into a little heap in his large arm-chair, and fled as fast as he could.

The old man, feeling rather than seeing that his tormentor had left him, stared with shy and timid looks around the room, seized his brow with his hand, breathed heavily, tried to call for assistance, tried to rise, and sank, groaning, slowly on the floor, remaining there prostrate and unable to move or to utter a sound.

Thus his valet found him perhaps half an hour later. He at once summoned another servant, and the two carried their helpless master to his bed. A physician was fortunately always in the house, since the old gentleman had had his nervous attacks, and thanks to his judicious and prompt treatment, the old gentleman's condition improved rapidly. The long-protracted lethargy, however, was now succeeded by fearful excitement ; his eyes rolled aimlessly all around, and unmeaning speeches followed each other in an unceasing flow, interrupted by painful fits of laughter. No sleep came.

On the following day also no improvement could be observed. He did not recognize the persons at his bedside, and although memory seemed to revive, it was very uncertain, and he constantly mixed up events and circumstances alike. Revolvers seemed to occupy his mind and to threaten him continually. He shook and started when any one drew near, and then again begged piteously not to be left alone and unprotected. Then he would ask for the reports from 'Change, walked up and down, and scolded physicians and servants because they would not let him drive into town.

Day after day the ante-rooms were filled with crowds of visitors and inquirers, but the poor old man could not be allowed to see any one, and even the names of his vis-

itors were not made known to him. Without rest in the day, without sleep at night, he wandered about in his golden apartments.

CHAPTER XX.

FATAL LOVE.

Comet's luck, since he had broken with Lily, was something fabulous. All his financial ventures succeeded with astonishing regularity. A wild energy seemed to possess him, which made him withdraw from no enterprise let it appear ever so venturesome, and yet when he had once entered into it, no man's judgment surpassed that of the great financier. He seemed at the same time utterly to despise what men might do to thwart him in his speculations, and to calculate his chances with minute precaution. His ventures could have ruined him, but he never shrank from the boldest, and in an incredibly short time his own wealth and the assets of the Imperial Bank had doubled. All attacks were silenced. All well-meaning papers, all conservative editors were on his side, and his adversaries were literally crushed under the weight of public opinion.

Thus he was lying one morning on his mechanical rocking-chair, that yielded to his slightest impetus, in his Bureau in the Bank, meditating on his unbroken successful career—and yet he looked haggard.

He could not forget Lily! He had conquered all temptations, and had not gone to see her, telling himself that it was wiser so, and because he was afraid of her. He had abstained from seeing her, even after the papers

had announced Prince Lignac's departure, and later his marriage. He did not wish himself to put the dagger into his adversary's hand, with which she might stab him. He had used all known means to forget her. He had first plunged into every kind of amusement that still had any charms for him. He went every night into company and drank champagne to excess. He had taken a new mistress, a fair, black-eyed ballet girl, admired by scores of young men, and yet faithful to him—but it was all in vain! Company was wearisome—the wine was not dry enough, the black-eyed girl failed to amuse him!

He had thrown himself zealously into politics; he obtained signal success in Parliament by his brilliant eloquence; he played high on 'Change and he won.

But it was all in vain! His victories in Parliament only made him despise those who applauded him, and his winnings on 'Change made him tire of money.

He had stopped one evening on his way home, and looking up at the golden stars in the dark blue sky, he had told himself that it was a misery to work so hard on earth when up there thousands of immeasurable unknown bodies proclaimed the infiniteness of the Universe. He thought the contemplation of the heavenly bodies might afford him distraction, and he had a small observatory erected on top of a tower that adorned his town-house. This he furnished with a telescope, and astronomical instruments and works. Then he engaged one of the men of the National Observatory to give him lessons and to help him in observing the constellations.

But it was all in vain! The stars did not draw him upward, but he drew them downward; the calculations and the watching became soon tiresome.

This morning he was thinking this over in silent, hopeless despair, when one of his servants came in hurriedly and in a state of great excitement, to tell him that his

wife had just fallen down fainting, and had died immediately afterwards.

Doctor Comet started up as if struck by an electric shock. "My wife is dead?" he asked.

"Yes!" said the servant.

"Is it certain?"

"We went for the doctor, and he said nothing could be done."

"Very well!" said Comet, "tell my daughter I'll be there in a moment."

"Rachel dead!" he said when the servant had left. "I never thought she could die!"

Mechanically he locked up all his papers, and then went and stood at the window. "I might buy her of her husband and marry her," he said. "That is one way. Blank will be content to get enough to live comfortably in Paris. She loves me, I know; if I had not known it, I should have hanged myself long ago! Yes, she loves me! The more I reflect upon her behavior, the more I read her letters, which she wrote me years ago—the more I feel certain that she loves me. There is an affinity between us that binds us, the one to the other, and that will kill us if we remain separated. That must be so or I could not be so very unhappy. And yet this passion—what has it ever done for me? My heart used to be pure—all my aspirations noble and lofty! And now I feel as if there were no crime I could not commit—if she demanded it. Yes, I could murder even her, if she did not hear me. How I should like to turn the pointed steel in her heart around and around!"

He ordered his horses and drove home to give the necessary orders for the funeral. Sylvia met him in tears; the other children also came and wept bitterly at this sudden parting. Comet himself could not check his tears when he saw the lifeless form of his wife before

him, and thought of the many, many years during which he had seen her every day.

He ordered a magnificent funeral and a monument of white marble six yards high, and costing several thousand dollars. The interment was witnessed by almost everybody in town who belonged to the upper classes of society; the grave was completely concealed under a small mountain of flowers, and the next day the inconsolable widower went on his way to Baron Blank's house.

Lily was alone, but her reception was not such as to infuse hope into Comet's bosom. Half sitting, half reclining on her couch, she kept perfectly cool, and pretended not to notice her visitor's evident excitement. On her lap, she had as of old, her black Angora cat with the long, silky hair, in which the long white fingers seemed to wander with evident delight. The creature, with its phosphorescent, half-veiled eyes, in its cunning cruelty seemed to be the very image of its mistress.

"I have been absent a long time, Lily," he said, trying to speak with composure.

"Almost six weeks!" was the reply.

Her eyes remained sleepily fixed upon the animal, while a gesture of the hand invited him to a seat.

"My wife is dead!" he said.

She barely touched him with a flash of fire leaping from under the half-raised lids of her deep eyes, and then she said:

"I see you are in mourning."

"Let us not be hypocrites," he continued, with an effort. "You know how I stood with poor Rachel."

She uttered a short, sharp laugh.

"I am pleased to be taught by you how to mourn. The depth of your feelings is distinctly visible. Now I understand your conduct towards me. The grief you

feel for Rachel—was that the name?—enables me to see how much you must have suffered when you lost me.”

“Don’t say that, Lily!” he replied. “Those words do not come from your heart. You know what I feel for you, and you see that I do not grieve as you pretend to imagine.”

The eloquent parliamentarian had, in her presence, lost all power over words, and his talents seemed to be smothered under the violence of his passion.

“You know,” he continued, after a pause of helpless embarrassment, “you know that I am your slave, that I cannot live without you, that I love you beyond all bounds.”

She laughed again. “Very well done! Well said! Now, please, go on! Slander the departed Rachel a little—tell me that she was the only hindrance to our union—that she is out of the way now, and that——”

“Oh, I swear to you,” he cried, “by all that is sacred, I swear by my honor, by my love——”

“Excellent,” she said, with her strident laugh, “an admirable lover! I suppose I am just sweet sixteen! I have just come from boarding-school!”

“Are you going to make me mad?” he hissed.

“Ah, Baldwin, there were times when you did that much better! I am not surprised that you are not in training. It is after all true,—art can never be a substitute for youth. We ought to be too sensible to rehearse such scenes, for we are both of considerable age. Go, make money, more money; increase your political greatness, and leave me my cat! Thus we can both lead a quiet, pleasurable life till the end comes.”

He sank back in his chair and stared at nothing.

Then he began in a quiet, subdued tone:

“You do not believe me. Put me to the test! Ask what you want! Anything!”

She raised herself up and said, quickly :

“Give me the address.”

He looked deeply pained at these words. “That is the one thing,” he said, timidly, “I cannot do ; at least not at present.”

She threw herself back and laughed.

“For Heaven’s sake,” he said, “do not misunderstand me. I have been signally unfortunate. The girl has, of her own will, left the place where she was, and I myself do not know at this hour where she is. But you may rest assured that I shall spare no trouble to find her. I am on her track already. Believe me !”

“Do not excite yourself, Baldwin ! You talk quite creditably—almost as well as a police-report.”

He saw clearly that she mistrusted him ; he felt as if his tongue were paralyzed. He knew he was at once guilty and innocent ;—the former because he had so long purposely concealed the child’s home, the latter because he told the truth in saying that he did not know where she now was. His suspicions had been excited by an appeal in the newspapers, which he attributed to Lily ; he had ordered the daughter to be carried to a distant town,—his agents had mismanaged the matter, and she had escaped, as we have seen.

“We will look for her together,” he said at last. “Only believe me. I have a great project. I have risen high in life. I have achieved much—I lay it all at your feet ! I do not wish you to believe—you shall see. I can make Blank a rich man, and there will be left more than enough to fulfil all our wishes. I shall never give you ground for complaint ; my whole life shall be devoted to your well-being, if you will only decide to be mine, and to join me in noble, legal wedlock !”

He looked at her in fearful anguish. His whole being



SHE RAISED HERSELF UP AND SAID QUICKLY: "GIVE ME THE ADDRESS."—See Page 208.

was consumed in anxious expectation. She closed her eyes. "That is highly immoral!" she said calmly.

He uttered a sarcastic laugh.

"And not only immoral but also unwise. You are your own worst enemy, Baldwin, and for the simple reason that you do not know yourself, I know you. You only value what you do not possess; what you own you despise. If I should really abandon poor Blank and marry you, I should only make us both desperately unhappy. You would soon tire of me;—were you not already tired of me when we were still in the heyday of passion, when your wife was still living, and this love had the irresistible charm of forbidden fruit for you? Besides—you would fall out with all your legitimate children, with all your relatives and friends, who would all be unable to comprehend how so great a statesman, a sedate old man, could go so far astray! No, Baldwin, you cannot live without courtiers and flatterers! You think too much of the world and of the world's opinion of you! I advise you for your best, Baldwin. Forget me!"

"One word," he said in a hoarse whisper, "only one word! and by that Mercy for which you hope in Heaven, tell me the truth! Do you love me still? Or do you love me no longer?"

She rose to her full height and for a moment or two looked at him fixedly. "No!" she said calmly, shaking her head. "No! I have loved you—but that is over. Even if I were to try it, I cannot do it!"

His heart beat fiercely, his eyes filled with a bright, dazzling glimmer, there was a roaring in his ears as if the world were going to pieces, and yet he heard Lily's voice high above it all, and it went like a sharp, double-edged sword through his heart. One moment he felt as if he would strangle her in his strong arms—the next

moment he hissed: "Then be cursed!" and tottered out.

As the door closed behind, she started up, flung the cat into a corner, and followed him with her eyes in wild triumph. Then, with brightly burning eyes, and her head carried on high, she walked with long, measured strides up and down in the room like a lioness in sight of her prey.

"I am an old man, and it is all over with me," said Doctor Comet to himself, as he slowly descended the staircase. He went away with a broken heart, melancholy, and with a wound that he felt to be deadly. Once more he looked at the well-known steps, the walls with their familiar faded frescoes, and the door where the angel stood with the flaming sword to keep him out of his paradise forever and forever now! His defeat, his humiliation, he felt was final. From that sentence there was no appeal! Not even if he should succeed in finding the child that had so mysteriously disappeared. No! Not even then! For he knew Lily had for once told the truth—she did not love him any more! And he, he wanted to be loved, he had the burning, consuming desire for love—and here he had wrecked his ship! This destroyed his hope and his courage at one fell blow, and he felt for the first time in his life that he was an old man, that the play was over, and that he must say farewell to the world.

It was nearly night; a cold, dense mist, with a slight, scattering rain, veiled the electric lights even, and made the movements in the streets a shadowy world. As in a dream the passers-by, the rattling carriages and the cries of the street boys flitted past him. He did not know where he was nor where he was going. Life was henceforth a spectacle only for him, he an indifferent

spectator ; the world had no interest for him any longer ; he belonged here already, to the majority.

Thus he walked down the splendid avenue of Unter den Linden, passed through the magnificent propylæum here repeated, out into the great park. A sharp wind arose, rustling in the sere and yellow leaves of the almost bare trees, knocking the branches against each other, and whistling through the twigs. Gradually the fine rain ceased, the fog sank down and fluttered away, the sky cleared up, and only isolated cloudlets were still drifting in and out among the sparkling stars.

“How I remember !” said the lonely wanderer to himself. “It was a night like this when I went home, drunk with delight, tottering in my ecstasy ! I had seen her the first time, sitting by her in a crowd, and the flash of her eyes, the sweet sound of her voice, and the play of her tiny hands, had made me forget the whole world ! I embraced the earth in my fervent love—I was swimming in an ocean of light, I could have kissed every tree in the park ! And now ! And now !”

Thus he stood awhile, motionless. Then the frost chilled him. He started anew, he entered the city once more, and moved mechanically. A ray of moonlight fell upon something shining on high ; he recognized it ; it was his own little observatory, lighted up as usual. This aroused in him a desire to look at the stars, and perhaps, like Wallenstein, to read his fate there. He went up and looked through the telescope. The sky was clear, no vapors born on earth ascended that high, and the heavenly waves of light came flowing down in blazing, dazzling clearness upon the eye of the unhappy man, who demanded of the stars that relief which the earth denied him.

But in vain ! His spirits did not rise ; his head sank down wearily. “What avails it that I know what an

atom I am on this great globe we call the earth? And what is the earth but an atom compared with the infinity of yonder spheres, among which a whole solar system appears but as a white spot? This atom, this microscopic being, which is but a parasite on an infusorial little creature, grieves because it cannot live near another atom. A miserable, wretched creature I am! Is it not a shame and a disgrace that I should grieve for a woman who herself is a disgrace to her sex? If she were but beautiful or young, or brilliant in mind, or celebrated in the world, or of signally noble character and most lovable disposition! But no—not a charm, not an attraction in mind, body or soul! She is an over-ripe fruit, pale of face, false of heart and malicious; she is despised by men, corrupted by the worst society, stained by all vices, a woman and yet no longer a woman! And I—I am a father who has children, sons and daughters, of hoary head, rich, esteemed, of great influence in the affairs of the greatest empire on earth, a man who might enjoy all the world can offer! And this inconceivable passion takes the cup from my lip.”

He seized his head with both hands and groaned deeply. “I am so weary, weary!” He repeated the terrible words again and again. After a long pause he broke out once more: “The Lethe of the Ancients is all that I can see on earth that is left me. Why not? Is there anything better that this world can offer me? Eternal forgetfulness! That suits me. As far as I can think back, I find no day that was half as sweet as a night of dreamless sleep, and if I go to meet eternal night without dreams, I shall only make an exchange, in which all the advantage is on my side—as has ever been the case in all that I have done during my life.”

Doctor Comet opened a bottle of champagne which

the servant placed there every evening, in case his master should need such refreshments, poured a powder into a goblet, and then filled it to the brim with the foaming wine.

He drank it, then he laid down on his ottoman covered with the rarest of Persian rugs, and closed his eyes.

Then he felt as if the poison began to have its effect and to confuse his senses ; the reality vanished ; it seemed to him—was it a vision, or did he really see the door open noiselessly and a womanly form glide in and draw near ? Was it really the well-known pale face with the deep, dark eyes, the one face he ever saw by day and by night, framed now in a black hood, and gazing at him ? He smiled in return to her inquiring looks, and gazed at her longingly, for he fancied that death was creating the sweet vision to escort him gently across to the other shore.

But reality had yet too much power over him, and as the face bent over him, and he actually felt the soft, perfumed breath, he knew that it was no dream, but that the loved one was really bodily in his house, in his room, in his arms ! With a mighty, with a sublime effort, he shook off the bonds with which the subtle poison had begun to fetter him, and raised himself. And then he saw, with despair in his sinking heart, that he, the Master of Intrigues, had acted like an apprentice, had lost his game by a wretched, hasty blunder !

She stared at him with strange-looking eyes, for she knew not what to make of him, and yet she knew, she saw, that something fearful must have happened here ! He was in high fever, his face all aglow, his eyes wandering.

“Put your arms around my neck,” he said, “then I can die quietly.”

Instinctively she drew back from this hand which seemed to her to be stretched out from the lower regions.

She was terrified, for she had expected a very different scene. She had expected to find a man mad with love, but not a man wounded to death. For a moment she paused, not knowing what to think, what to do. Then she turned to flee. But with a fearful curse he seized her by the hair and pulled her down to him on the couch.

“You do not seem disposed to die with me!” he sneered. “There is enough for you left in the cup!”

He kissed her and she felt paralyzed in all her limbs.

“Oh, Baldwin,” she begged, with a faint voice. “Oh, Baldwin, let me go—I’ll run—to buy some antidote.”

“You might forget to come back,” he replied; “better stay here—why do you not drink?—drink, my treasure!—come with me across the river—to the other shore—everything is so dull here and tiresome!”

He wanted to say more, to do much, to kiss her or to kill her, he knew not which—but the short effort of his will succumbed to the fatal benumbing power of the drug. While he was searching for words that might make an impression upon her, his consciousness began to leave him again, and his tongue would not move. Then an irresistible indifference and weariness overpowered him, and he sank back with heavy breathings.

Lily tried to raise herself, shuddering with icy horror, but she could not get up, her hair being still held by the hand of the dying man, and she uttered shriek after shriek. She turned and twisted to get free from the *iron grasp of the spasmodic hand*, but she could not, and this struggle with a dead man threatened to upset her reason. At last she succeeded with her two hands to break open the rapidly stiffening fingers, and to set herself free; but quite a bunch of her hair remained between the fingers, as if her victim—for was she not his murderess?—wanted to carry a souvenir of her with him into the grave.

She was superstition by nature and by education, and

at once the idea took possession of her that the dead man was going to use that hair in order to draw her after him into his grave. She wanted to escape, but she found she had no strength. She sank down into a chair and remained there many hours, her eyes fixed immovably on his pale face, and with all the power of her will she found herself unable to withdraw them from the appalling spectacle. At last she broke out into a loud hysterical laugh, and this shock to her nerves fortunately broke the charm.

“It is all true,” she said to herself; and aloud, “the thing is true. He has taken poison. He has killed himself.”

She now remembered that he had said there was enough in the cup for her. She took it and tasted a few drops. It was bitter; she set the cup down and shuddered with a sense of death.

She began to think once more. Was life worth living? Might she not make an end of it as he had done? Besides, what would the world say? Should she go away now, or wait till people came and found her there? Would she have to appear in court and give her evidence of what she had seen and experienced here at this hour of the night?

She saw clearly her great danger. She had been seen going to the house; she could not go away again without being seen by the servants. It was very probable—it was quite certain, she would be summoned to appear in court. She might even be charged with murder!

What could—what must she do?

With a contemptuous smile on her lips she raised the goblet once more and carried it as far as her mouth—there, of a sudden, the image of her lost daughter appeared before her mind’s eye, and her eyes lost their fixed expression. Then a flood of tears streamed down

the pale cheeks. She hurled the cup away with genuine horror, so that the glass broke with a loud crash, and the death-bringing beverage soaked into the carpet. With a fierce shriek, and after a last shy glance at the dead man, she ran and ran as if a spectre was coming after her in eager pursuit.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT THE GRAVE.

Sylvia was pleasantly engaged in devising, with the assistance of a renowned *modiste* and her own dressmaker, a mourning costume which would combine in its "tendency" respectful grief for a lost mother with the necessary regard for the fashions of the world, when her father's old valet appeared at the door. A glance at his pale face and distorted features prepared her for another calamity, but when he summoned at last courage to tell her the dreadful news, she showed her usual wonderful self-control. She felt for a moment as if this blow were too much for her, and a sinking feeling warned her that she might faint. She at once took the old man's arm, and, resting on it, she went slowly but resolutely up the long, steep stairs that led to her father's little study.

A cry escaped her when she saw the horror with her own eyes; the dead body on the couch, the goblet on the carpet.

In a whisper the servant told her, as she was sitting there with her hands hiding the fearful scene from her eyes, of the restlessness and the melancholy which the faithful old servant of late had noticed in his beloved master; he re-

lated the circumstances, as far as he knew them, which had accompanied the piteous end, and mentioned also the name of the lady who had left the house at midnight like a fugitive.

This report at once restored to the worldly-wise girl her full, elastic power. She saw that she here faced an event which might be fatal to the name and fame of her father, in fact to the social standing of the whole family, and that it lay in her hand to keep the calamity from the world. This great responsibility, instead of overwhelming her, served to restore to her the full control over her mental powers. She secured the silence of the old man, appealing to his attachment to his old master and the whole family, and then sent immediately for the family physician, who was fortunately a safe and discreet man, in whose friendship she had perfect confidence. To him she revealed all, judging that confidence, to be valued, must be complete, and received in return the assurance of his hearty and energetic coöperation.

Thus she succeeded in making it appear that apoplexy had suddenly struck the great man down, as he rested from his absorbing work in this world, by communing, as far as he could, with the higher powers of another world. Only a few very intimate friends were permitted to guess part of the reality, but the bronze hair, which the dead man took into the grave with him, was seen by the physician only and the old valet. The house of mourning was almost literally buried under thousands of thousands of evidences of sympathy from the powers that be, from his compeers in the high courts of the realm and the princes of finance, down to the humblest depositors in his various banks, and the recipients of his charities under various forms. The largest hall of the sumptuous building had, by the skilful management of the society called Pietas, which undertook only funerals of the highest class and

character, been transformed into a *chapelle ardente*, in which tall silver candlesticks stood around the bier on a platform that was nearly concealed behind groups of rarest, tropical plants. The reverend-looking, white-haired old gentleman who directed the work of a number of black-costumed underlings, aided by a score or two house-servants in new liveries of black and silver, cast a last long look at the preparations, wiped a few drops of perspiration, which he alone perceived, from his forehead, and emptying a glass of old Madeira, which the valet, his dear old friend, had taken care to have on hand, he said :

“I presume he himself”—and made a mysterious gesture with the hand.

“Oh, no! Never!” asserted the servant, faithful to his promise. The reverend man, however, said nothing and only looked a little more melancholy.

“In so young a widower it is remarkable,” he continued. “Bachelors and widowers rarely do it. I do not think more than five per cent. But, was it not the young one rather—eh?”

The valet pretended not to understand, and solemnly emptied his own glass of wine, which he knew how to appreciate, having felt it his duty now for many years carefully to sample his master's wines. The hour of the great ceremony drew near ; the surrounding streets were crowded with people of all ages and all conditions, and when the procession at last started from the house, the experts affirmed that there must have been more than ten thousand spectators present. The news of Comet's decease had made a deep and painful impression upon the minds of the party, among whose principal leaders he had always been counted, and they availed themselves now of the magnificent funeral prepared by his family in order to testify their sympathy with the aspirations of

the departed, as well as their own principles and political views.

Several of his friends spoke at the grave, eloquent men who were fully able while praising the good qualities and brilliant achievements of the deceased, to bring forward and exhibit in an admirable light their own religious or political convictions. The loudest and most general applause, however, fell to the share of a renowned professor who possessed a special gift to keep always slightly ahead of what, with rare perspicacity, he discerned to be the popular tendency of the day, and combined with it a happy talent of using the catch-words of the period as if they were his own happy inventions. He waited for a signal of the reverend man "that all the appointed orators" had had their time, and now came forward to crown the ceremony with his masterpiece of eloquence. His speech was brilliant, and if it did not add one new leaf to the laurel wreath which all these great men and orators to-day had woven around the brow of the departed, it added largely to the speaker's renown, and soon after brought him the long-coveted reward—his election to the Imperial Diet.

The brighter and the more widely spread, however, these eulogies were, the more painfully did the family feel the secret thorn of their knowledge. Old Doctor Steelyard, especially, listened to these orations, in which truth and fiction were so strangely interwoven, with great bitterness in his heart, and sadness in his soul. Nor did Mrs. Clara Steelyard, the sister of the dead man, suffer less from this new blow that fell upon the family. She had been for several days in a state of painful excitement about her son Alfonse, who had mysteriously disappeared, for a little note in which he spoke of the necessity of making a short trip for recreation was not of the kind to blind any one. And now came this crushing

blow—the loss of a brother whom she had truly loved. Although he had not exactly been a good brother, but had, on the contrary, rather fostered her weak propensities, and encouraged her in her false education of her son, she still was grateful to him who forebore scolding her and kindly indulged her in her foibles. He had been her pride and her glory. She had admiringly watched his success and his triumph over all his enemies, and had looked upon his fine mansion, with its brilliant entertainments and famous feasts, as a kind of family temple, so that now she felt, as she said, as “if the whole world was breaking to pieces.”

Sylvia kept up during the first days because so much was required of her. This clear-sighted young girl developed in this crisis a very unusual energy, and without consulting brother or sister, or even her betrothed, she seized the reins of the home government and held them in a firm and masterful hand.

She took her father's keys and examined his papers, partly in order to destroy every trace that might hereafter lead to the discovery of many things that had to be kept secret, and partly to ascertain if there were any testamentary directions to be found. After having searched conscientiously through the whole house, and after burning every paper that seemed suspicious, but without finding any trace of a last will, she went, with a notary, to the Bank of which her father had so long been president. Here she continued her search, and at last found her labors rewarded. A succinct account of all his funds and property of every kind, carefully kept and balanced to the last day of his life—and his secret correspondence. She burnt all letters and pictures, without reading the former, and merely glancing at the latter. A testament was not to be found, but the list of all the deceased had owned, and the manner in which he wished each member

of his family to be endowed, was sufficient. She found herself an heiress to the amount of at least a million.

When, however, everything had been set in order, when the funeral was over, and the remoter kinsmen had returned to their more or less distant homes, she felt almost prostrated, and deep sadness filled her soul. She felt great repugnance to receive visits of condolence, and the knowledge which she, and she alone possessed, of her father's real end, made her shrink even from contact with her own family. Thus it came about that she sent a small note to her betrothed, in which she begged him, from consideration for her personal feelings, to break off, for a time, their correspondence, and, of course, their meetings also, had her trunks packed and went to visit a distant city, where her older sister's servant was in garrison. Here, she hoped, new surroundings might rouse her from her prostration.

Edward Frank felt little pleasure in reading that letter. "When does she need me," he said to himself, "if not in the hour when grief and sorrow visit her? She has a man's temper, and I fear she will try to make me a 'Prince Consort' rather than a husband." Fortunately, however, there came soon after, a letter from Italy which led his thoughts into a new channel. This was a most liberal offer made by one of his princely patrons in that distant land, and for some time he felt undecided. He was walking up and down in his room, uncertain whether he should consult his betrothed, when a knock came to his door, and upon invitation a veiled lady entered.

Astonished, he gazed at her, as she paused on the threshold and examined him with her brilliant, black eyes, which actually blazed through the black veil. She was slender and tall, and her carriage betrayed the habits of good society. In a few hardly intelligible words, she apologized for her intrusion, sat down on the chair

which Edward at once courteously offered her, and then threw back her veil. The light of a hanging-lamp, with a large reflector above it, fell in full force upon a pale face on which fierce passions unfortunately had left fiery traces, but which to Edward's artistic eye revealed all the elements of a regular and uncommonly seductive beauty; on the other hand, what did that portentous expression mean which spoke of an energetic will and of so many trials, so many fierce battles for the supremacy?

The imprint of high mental powers was not to be mistaken, nor the seal of high breeding. But what struck Edward most, was the almost immediate conviction, that he had met this person before, although he was utterly at a loss to say where that could have been? He surely had seen that remarkable high forehead with the wonderfully deep-seated eyes and the light, curling hair above it? But where and when? Besides, at a glance, he noticed a certain air of frivolity, a breath of that weariness that adheres to many who have drained the cup of life to the dregs, and this feature removed the face again out of the circle of his few friends.

Evidently she had to overcome a slight sense of embarrassment, but as soon as this was put aside, she came at once with the pointed certainty of people of the world, to the motive of her visit.

"Mr. Frank," she said, "I happen to know of your engagement to Miss Sylvia Comet. I was a friend—a near friend—to her father, who has just left us."

Edward looked at her with great surprise.

"My name is Lily Blank."

Edward bowed. He remembered having heard that name, and connected with it a reputation of great eccentricity, and an at least doubtful mode of life in the

fashionable circles of the great city. What he had heard of her had not prepossessed him.

“I have,” she continued with an unusually firm voice and utterly undismayed by the manifestly unfavorable impression which this mention of her name was producing, “I have heard your name spoken as that of a courteous and chivalrous man, and I felt prompted, therefore, to come to you first of all among the members of the family Comet, in order to secure aid and advice for a lady in trouble.”

“I pray, madame, you will honor me with your ‘confidence.’”

“The matter is very delicate,” she said, biting her lower lip and breathing deeply, “and a matter which may be utterly hopeless. But I do not mean to abandon all hope until I have tried literally everything that can be tried.”

A single tear fell upon her gloved hand.

Edward once more promised to help her as far as he could. She waited a few moments, and then continued in an easier tone :

“I am in search of a person who is very dear to me, and my only comfort is the thought that this world is after all very small.”

“Madame,” said Edward seriously, “you may be right as long as you speak of the so-called upper classes, but I doubt much that your axiom is as true when we speak of the great mass of the common people.”

“No,” she cried anxiously, “you must not—you shall not rob me of my consolation ! I tell you I must find her—I must.”

“I am far from desirous to discourage you,” he said calmly. “At all events you may rest assured of my cordial assistance.”

She rested her head on her hands, and told him, with cast-down eyes, as much of her relations to the departed

banker and as much of her own past as she deemed necessary to win the young artist's sympathy with herself and her cause. She told him finally that she was in search of her daughter, whom she had never seen, and whom, for long years, she had believed to be dead.

"It is not possible," she concluded, "at least I do not think it possible, that among his papers there should not be something that might lead to the child. He cannot have left the poor thing unprovided for. It is true, he told me himself that he did not know where she was, as she had changed her place of residence contrary to his will, but I know that this was merely a device of his. He had his reasons to conceal from me first that she was alive, and later where she was living. May God pardon him this secrecy, for it would be fearful if by such mistrust a poor mother should be forever robbed of the love of a daughter! Therefore I come to you, sir, to beg you will, for my sake, try to get access to his papers, and without betraying me, to find in his papers what is so important for my happiness. By the aid of your betrothed or of the executor—I know nothing of the details—you can no doubt easily get the information. You see, I trust, that no other way remained for me if I wished to avoid a scandal that would ruin me."

"And you, madame, have you really no means? Do you really not even know the girl's name?"

"I know that she was called Francisca Welborn. At least he said so. But this is absolutely all I know. I have not even a portrait. I have advertised in that name in the public papers, but all in vain."

Edward was conscious that in his present relations to his betrothed, and with her extreme reserve, the task which this lady imposed upon him was not an easy one. And yet he could not compel himself to deny a mother's lacerated heart at least one effort to ascertain her secret.

He promised, therefore, the inquiring eyes and the beseeching lips all they demanded.

She seemed, however, to have read his momentary hesitation and fear in his face, for she seized his hands and said with an inimitable gesture of prayer and of trusting confidence: "I am sure of your warm sympathy, and my heart tells me that I have found a friend in you and an ally. The good God has marked your face with the expression of a noble heart. You will not disappoint my hopes! I feel in your presence a peace which has been for years a stranger to my life, and my hopes revive, giving me new courage to fight my desperate battle." Then she rose, drew the veil once more down over her face, and went away.

He looked long after her, admiring her wondrously graceful carriage and her eloquent eyes, and felt deep sympathy with her mournful fate.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CAUTIOUS HEIRESS.

Sylvia was sitting with her sister Clara, Doctor Steel-yard's god child, in the red boudoir, meditating on her future. The short journey, the new impressions, had already benefited her and although still pale she looked well again. Her black eyes rested upon her sister's face with the old flash of mental superiority, and a critical expression.

"The family has been signally unfortunate of late," she said, "wherever I look, I see mourning. From cousin Alfonse I expect little that is good. He is a nice fellow,

but as long as I know him, as little to be counted upon as the weather. To-day green, to-morrow who knows what? He is sure to be doing mischief somewhere. I do not wonder aunt is so anxious about him. It is too remarkable how utterly and how suddenly he has disappeared, leaving no trace whatever behind; Clara, we must be very careful with our money. You see we have no parents. We are perfectly alone. Even Ephraim did not come to the funeral. And to think of our great uncle Liondell! A man so immeasurably rich! And not—what good are all his millions to the poor old man? It is the grief for Amadeus that has pulled him down so! He has not been the same man ever since the day on which Amadeus fell from his horse. How his good heart was wound up with that boy!”

“I suppose Countess Hyacinth will now marry that Count Eyry?” asked Clara.

“I am told he is gone to Russia.”

“Yes, but my husband says he does not think the young man can get there in time for the expedition against the—the people with the awful name, that I never can remember.”

“Countess Hyacinth was not very civil to me. How did you like her?”

“I have only seen her once. She looked to me very haughty.”

“I do not think she suited Amadeus. Oh, Clara, how strangely God’s ways are not our ways! To think what projects Amadeus had formed, when he should inherit his father’s millions—and now—By the way, Clara, what did your husband think of the investments?”

“He was only surprised there should be so much; otherwise he said nothing!”

“It is much,” said Sylvia. “We shall be able to live

very handsomely, perhaps to do even more than that. My intention is, when I marry, my husband shall give up most of his work, and only carry out the grandest and the finest structures. An artist can be, in his way, just as distinguished and eminent as an officer. Baron Werner paints only princely personages and great battle pieces. My idea is that Edward shall only take orders from the Emperor, from princes, and the most eminent personages."

"To be sure," said Clara admiringly. "And then he may become a professor!"

"Ah!" laughed Sylvia, "professor is nothing now-a-days! He must have a much higher title than that, and get a place in the cabinet!"

"To be sure!" repeated Clara.

While they were thus coolly discussing their inheritance, a letter from her betrothed came for Sylvia. In this note, abounding in protestations of exalted attachment and perfect devotion, he announced his arrival on the same day. Sylvia did not understand this disobedience and was rather troubled.

Edward had overcome his scruples and reached the blue room with a heart overflowing with love and devotion. Tears came to his eyes as he saw the beautiful, clever face, and the black costume, and thought of the sorrow his beloved had to bear. He could hardly utter a word and held her closely pressed to his bosom, till she pushed him back with quiet force. Then at last he found words, and spoke with cordial warmth of his new plans.

"My dearest, sweetest Sylvia," he said, "I bring you such pleasant news, and a proposal which, I am sure, will delight you also."

Sylvia looked at him at once with doubting glances. She remembered that Edward's favorite proposals had

rarely been such as to elicit great admiration in her, and she waited, therefore, now also to hear the details. "Only this thought," he continued, "could give me courage to act contrary to your wishes, for you know how obedient I always am."

"Just imagine," he continued, "I got a letter from Prince Pallavicini, whose acquaintance I made in Italy, in Rome, last year, and who has always shown me great kindness. He intends renovating an old castle which he has fallen heir to in one of the most romantic situations near Naples, and he asks me to make a plan. This is something quite out of the usual routine, and will take some time. The letter has delighted me more than I can tell you. I had never imagined that the prince, an elderly man, would gain sufficient confidence in my talent to give me the preference over so many famous architects among his own countrymen. The letter opens a new and most promising outlook for me in my profession, and fills me with brightest hopes. I am going to build my noble patron a home that shall be worthy of his illustrious race, of his own vast possessions and his boundless hospitality. I mean to build it in the purest Grecian style, and delight in the idea of having a free hand to do something grand and beautiful. You will go with me to Italy, and we shall have a genuine artist's career before us, while we escape, at the same time, from the tattle of idle people and from the mournful impressions which have already driven you away from Berlin."

Sylvia cast down her eyes.

"I cannot help wondering, Edward," she said, "that you should think of our union now, in the first weeks of my deep sorrow."

"I understand," he said, eagerly, "that you are depressed, but where could you find better consolation than in my love?"

“Dear Edward, you men drive straight ahead and do not look at the road; but you ought to bear in mind that common decency even demands my forgetting all that has happened between us, at least for half a year.”

“Common decency!” exclaimed Edward, with great impatience in his tone and manner. “Well then, let us sacrifice the half year to the world! But what do you think of the other part of my suggestion? Does this order of the prince not rejoice you as it does me? Does it not delight you to have a life in Italy before you, if you so choose? Think of that grand, magnificent structure which is to be entrusted to my invention—to my decoration!”

“Oh, certainly,” said Sylvia, “only, my dear Edward—”

“Well, then, listen! You are depressed now and cannot see things except through a veil, darkly—but cross the Alps, look down upon the land where the oranges grow, and you will see things differently! Let it be, therefore, as I said. I’ll come in six months to fetch you, my betrothed, and you will see how fair and how happy life can be! We Germans are, after all, still genuine barbarians, and the poorest beggar on the Chiaja in Naples lives freer and happier than the Privy Councilor or the General in his study here, and he knows it. Offer some work to a lazzarone. If it does not suit him, he does not accept it. He will not do it for much gold. He has the glorious light of his Southern sky, the wonderful sea with its thousand ever-changing hues, and for a few pence he can eat enough for a day. He is the real king. To tell the truth, I have always had a kind of homesickness for Italy. Here men are Scythians; they have no idea of art. What they put here on canvas, what they carve here out of marble, hurts me. And this climate! Every man here has a barometer—a thing

which to them is utterly unknown. Here, the unconscious longing for the light of the sun drives people every day anew to the glass to see if the weather will never, never be bright again. There, fine weather is a matter of course, at least as much so as air for our breathing. Ah! my dearest Sylvia, we shall be so happy down there! No foolish ceremonies will hamper us at every step. We shall walk on marble, we shall sail across the transparent sea, and when everything above us and around us is full of life and glow and fire, listen to the gay barcaroles of happy fishermen!"

It had never struck Sylvia as much as to-day how greatly her lover, after all, was deficient in genuine, refined culture. He had ideas, words and views which made her shiver. He would have to change greatly before she could make up her mind to make him her husband.

"My dear Edward," she said, "I cannot judge of the beauty of Italy, as I have never been there. I remember, however, that friends of mine told much of certain peculiarities of hotels, which made a stay at Naples almost impossible. People evidently differ in their views. Nor can I deny that I should be better pleased if you could secure permanent and lucrative employment in Berlin, rather than run after adventurous projects. Your favorable view of art in Italy, I presume, is only the result of a momentary bad humor, such as befalls young artists very often when they think that the deserved rewards are withheld from them. I have often told you a young artist cannot expect that men will, simply to please him, abandon the old views and establish a new school! Your great patron is generally looked upon as an eccentricity of the first water, and his taste stands almost alone. If you had followed poor papa's advice, and had drawn up a plan for old Uncle Liondell's new

villa, with the kitchen in a separate, detached building, you would now be all the fashion, and grand-uncle's sad state of mind would have had nothing to do with your contract."

Edward Frank, with all the love in his heart, which he really felt, could not help seeing that between him and his betrothed there was a gulf that would be difficult to bridge over. Deeply wounded in what was most sacred to him on earth, the worship of the beautiful, he saw how far their minds and hearts were apart. A deadly snow-storm buried the greening growth of his hopes in an instant. He was, however, rather indignant than resentful, and with flashing eyes and raised voice, he said to her :

"You speak too logically, Sylvia, to speak unconsciously. But mind this one thing : I shall never follow such wretched, worldly wisdom, and if this is an impediment to our union, our paths in life will have to go in different directions."

Sylvia stared, frightened, at his manly face, and her cheeks lost all color. She had not meant that ! He looked so grand and beautiful in his wrath ! The light hair surrounded his head with a bright halo, the slender, admirably built form seemed to grow in his indignation, and once more—as so often before—she had to confess to herself that he was perhaps the finest looking man she had ever seen in her life. She felt, deep in her heart, that in spite of all his shortcomings, she would find it hard to lose him.

"Do you so easily give me up ?" she asked. "Is your love so fickle that it cannot bear your vanity to be offended by calm reasoning ? Is it possible that now in my deep sorrow you can inflict upon me such grief ? You are silent ! Well, then I only see how far your love is beneath mine. You might say to me what you chose—I

could not forsake you thus ! Is not my whole future life built upon you as its foundation ? Do I not put my whole trust and confidence in you ? How can you then misunderstand me so grievously ? You know that—if you give me up, I stand literally, utterly alone in the world !”

Edward looked at the large, tear-filled eyes, he saw the trembling, quivering red lips he had so often kissed, and an impulse of compassion got the upper hand over his indignation. With a truly noble effort he blamed himself, thinking he might have been too rough and rude with his betrothed, at an hour, too, when she needed the most tender treatment. He at once tried to console her, and said, with an effort to soothe her : “ We can return to those plans of mine some other day, for to reject at once and forever the generous offer of my Neapolitan prince, would, I fear, make a bad impression.”

But if he expected Sylvia to meet him half-way, or even a step or two at least, he was doomed to disappointment ; not a word did she say in return to his generous self-surrender, and just at this moment he remembered the commission he had so rashly undertaken : the inquiry among the old banker’s papers for the benefit of the poor mother in search of her lost child. He felt bound to do it, for he had promised—but how unpropitious was the moment !

“ Is there anything else you wish to tell me ?” his betrothed asked him, for she read his mind in his open face. Edward had to do what he had promised he would try to do, for the opportunity might never return. Besides, he was ashamed to be afraid of a girl, and to lack the courage needed to do a good deed.

He sat down opposite Sylvia and told her why he desired to be allowed to look into her father’s papers—that it was for a person in distress, and who had at least

a certain right to ask the favor. He accompanied his request, moreover, with all assurances he could think of, but noticed at once that either his diplomatic skill was very small, or Sylvia's self-will very strong, for her face looked icy cold, and her broad brow darkened ominously. Her thoughts had immediately reverted to that huge volume in which her father had entered the different amounts which together constituted his immense fortune, and in which of course her own share, a million, was carefully recorded. Until now she had considered Edward a man who lacked perhaps the finer, higher culture, and was utterly unpractical, but she had always believed in his perfectly candid and honest heart. But now she thought he bore a mask, and concealed behind it a calculating spirit and a covetous disposition. It was infamous! Now that she refused to go to Italy with him, he wanted to convince himself if she was at all worth making sacrifices for! He wanted to know how much she owned! The same spirit which after her father's death had enabled her to assume the supreme command in the house at once, supported her here also.

"The inheritance of my sainted father," she told him calmly, "is sacred to me, and no one shall intrude upon it. Not even my brother-in-law has raised any such claims; and not my brothers nor my sisters have seen a single paper. You know that I was, of all his children, the one who, of late, lived in close communion with him and enjoyed his special confidence. I act as I think he would have wished me to act, had he foreseen the terrible calamity."

Edward turned red. "I cannot imagine," he said to Sylvia, "what can make you act in this extraordinary way. I will not inquire into your motives. Besides, I have given my word not to betray the person whose agent I am."

“That is an additional reason, then, why I shall not allow those precious papers to be disturbed.”

“Be calm, Sylvia, I beseech you. The question is one which can be settled in the quietest way, but which may also develop very embarrassing difficulties if you refuse to trust me.”

“What you say, my dear Edward, only confirms my decision that I shall not allow you or any one to examine the books,” she said most decidedly. She convinced herself more and more that her betrothed only wished to obtain a knowledge and an influence which she was determined never to let him gain. Even if for the present his purpose was not so much to inquire after the money matters, as after some secret affair, she would not allow any such intrusion. She had spent days and nights even in perusing all the papers and letters of her father, his private correspondence as well as his official letters, in settling everything in order, and in destroying every scrap of paper that could possibly have caused annoyance if it had fallen into improper hands. She had burnt whole piles of paper. She now felt perfectly secure, and knew that nothing could be found to embarrass the family. But against her betrothed she had unfortunately conceived this mistrust, and such indignation that she was almost determined to break with him altogether.

Edward, however, was quite as much seized with anger and bitterness, by both her refusal and the tone in which she spoke.

“I see,” he said, “you know exactly what you want. That is, no doubt, a valuable quality, but I cannot conceal from you that in a woman whom I wish to make my wife I look for more yielding affection, more gentleness, in fact more of a womanly character.”

These words drove her to a decision. She rose, and said in a cold, sharp voice:

“It may be that you do not find in me what you are looking for. I also have seen that we do not suit each other. I release you. It will be best we say farewell to each other, and avoid meeting in the future.”

The business-way in which Sylvia could speak, this masculine energy of a lady who looked so tender and so delicate, chilled Edward to his innermost heart.

“If I were to treat with a lawyer, I could not expect other words,” he said to himself.

He drew the ring from his finger, with which, according to the custom of the land, he had bound himself to Sylvia, laid it silently and with a bow on the table, and went out.

She remained standing like a statue in the middle of the room, and looked after him with a face that seemed to be carved of alabaster. Then she sank with a deep sigh back into her chair and looked sadly at the future. She had done her duty, and was convinced she had secured her happiness in life—but life itself appeared to her veiled by gray, dismal mists.

In the meantime Edward went straight to the railway station and returned to the city by the next train. He was astonished at his great calmness. He felt relieved—as if a burden had been taken from him. He soon began no longer to look back with regret, but to look forward to the future with bright anticipations. Of course his vanity was there, much offended, much lacerated, and whenever his thoughts went back to the scene in the blue-room, he felt a certain bitterness at heart. But the sting did not enter deep, and his thoughts were quite ready to take him from his prudent, calculating betrothed to sweeter and more pleasant images.

The thought that he had signally failed in obtaining the desired information for the poor, ill-treated mother, pained him deeply, but he determined to try his best to

obtain for her access to one or the other of the lawyers connected with the great banker's affairs.

And then there arose before his mind's eye, in an entirely new light, an image which he had almost forcibly pushed into the back-ground, though never forgotten—the image of the fair orphan who had met his toast to the Eternal Gods with a smile which was indelibly engraven on his memory. “She would never demand,” he said to himself, “that her betrothed should only visit in good society, and anxiously crave orders from bankers and other high personages.” His lively imagination at once built up tempting visions. He saw a quiet, happy home, where Alma ruled, if she would follow him to Italy to bless him by her love, unmindful of what people might say. With her he would rove through field and forest, and sail across the blue waters, never caring anxiously for much plate and fine damask and the last fashions, but quite content with the simple maccaroon and the bottle of Capri wine, which they could enjoy under the shade of a vine-covered bower, with a genuine piece of Paradise spread out at their feet, and the world miles and miles away, out of sight and out of hearing.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BETROTHAL.

Edward Frank's first duty was to go to the Baroness Blank and to report to her the failure of his efforts, and to advise her to choose other agents for the discovery of her all-important secret. She came to meet him eagerly, and led him with a hand so cold that he felt the coldness through the kid glove, to the arm-chair in which poor

old Comet had so often been sitting. He told her of his trip, and the stubbornness of Miss Sylvia. She listened with rigid features, then she folded her hands and with tearful eyes she said : "Oh, pray, try it once more with your betrothed !"

"I am excessively sorry," he said to her, "but my influence is at an end. Miss Sylvia Comet is my betrothed no longer. We have yesterday reached the conviction that we do not suit one another."

"Surely," she asked, frightened, "my request has not been the cause of this rupture ?"

"The occasion perhaps, but not the cause, Baroness. You need not let that trouble you ! Our characters are too far apart to allow us to live so near together."

"Live so near together !" she repeated, sighing and bowing her head.

He looked down on the carpet, giving her time to reflect, deeply moved by the pain that spoke in her voice.

"What am I to do ?" she asked at last.

He told her that he thought she was justly entitled to inquire if the banker's last will did or did not contain certain provisions for herself or the lost child, and recommended her to apply to Doctor Steelyard, whose kindness of heart and firmness of mind were most likely to support her cautious inquiries. She seemed to be most painfully embarrassed, and assured him that she would never, never venture again to mention the circumstances which she had entrusted to his well-meaning and discreet friendship. She twisted her hands and sobbed bitterly.

Edward went to the window and looked out ; it was too painful to him to witness her painful and apparently irrepressible excitement. After a long pause he turned round, and in so doing perceived a portrait that was

standing on a chair, and instantly absorbed his whole attention. It was the face of a girl whom he knew well, whose image pursued him by day and by night—a face, moreover, of surpassing beauty. The sudden sight caused his blood to stop in the chambers of his heart, and so completely drove all thoughts of the baroness out of his mind that he hardly knew where he was.

“Where on earth did you get that picture?” he asked, seizing the canvas and carrying it to the window for a better light.

“The picture seems to strike you,” she said, drawing nearer. “That was my fate also when I saw it first, and thus I bought it at once,—for your happiness, it would seem, for you look fascinated!”

“No, that is not the whole of it! I know, however, the original, and here—see! there is my dear friend’s name in large letters on the back! He has made a masterpiece of it, and yet, if he thinks a good painter ought to embellish a portrait, he is mistaken, for this girl is a thousand times handsomer in nature, than on this canvas.”

The baroness looked with astonishment at the young man, and a wearied smile appeared in her face as she thought that no doubt tender relations existed between him and the original of the portrait.

Edward noticed it and on his lips hung an apology; but as he began, another look at the likeness suddenly made an end to the courteous speech, scarcely begun, and with rapidly increasing marvel, he went on examining one by one, the oval of the eyes, the amorous bow of her lips, the outline of her brow, in short, every single feature of her face.

“I do not know,” he said at last, with some hesitation; “have I merely indulged in a fancy, very common to artists, or do you really bear a most striking resemblance

to this girl? I could swear, relying on my painter's eye, that you must have looked exactly as this picture when you were at that age. I beg your pardon."

She shook her head sadly. "You need not ask my pardon," she said, "I know that I am old. Once before I have been told that my brow is like this brow, but I do not flatter myself with the idea of ever having looked as this girl does!"

"We artists," replied Edward, after a long, searching look, "have some practice in reading features. A man must have a certain power of observation if he wants to do something in this line. I remember, besides, that when I first saw this likeness I thought it resembled my betrothed."

He paused, suddenly overcome by a new thought, and looked alternately at the baroness and then again at the portrait.

"What do you mean?" asked the lady, who began feeling as if she also were affected by the thoughts that were stirring.

"I mean, that if you had not told me your child's name was Francisca Welborn, I would have sworn to Heaven that this girl here was your daughter!"

She uttered a wild cry and fell back a moment; then she seized him by the arm with such vehemence that the picture fell to the ground and the frame broke to pieces.

"Where is she? what is her name? where does she live? He can very well have lied to me with the name, as he did with the other statements. It was his nature to lie. Oh, tell me where she is! Do not deceive me! Tell me that again. If I had not— Oh, Lord of Heaven and Earth! Could it have been a mother's mistrust that made me love this child? Ah! if this sweet, dear, angelic face should be my daughter! Have I not

sought the painter up and down in all the studios of the city?"

Edward, himself greatly excited, had to beg her to compose her mind and to look at the picture carefully and critically. When he had taken up the likeness again, and leading Lily before a mirror, begged her to compare the two faces she saw there, and when he then told her all he knew about the girl's antecedents, the conviction was almost complete, and all doubts seemed to vanish. Lily would not delay a moment now, and insisted upon going at once to Punkinton, and to see the girl herself. She laughed and she wept, and was in a state of excitement which bordered upon insanity.

Edward, however, preserving a cooler mind, represented to her how grievously she might compromise herself by such an open avowal—as her confession would of course immediately become known—and persuaded her at last to let him make first certain inquiries about the girl, while he promised promptly and fully to report all that might be discovered of the girl's history.

His first visit led to the Lehman family, where the fair orphan still was, who at first, apparently so entirely out of reach, had suddenly been brought so near to him—a change in their relative positions, which caused him no joy. For the baroness, who was so anxiously bent upon recovering her lost child, was by no means the woman to whom he would like to entrust his heart's love. He had to confess to himself that it was mainly this aversion to any intimacy between Alma and the family of the Baroness Blank, that had induced him to dissuade the latter so earnestly from visiting Alma at once. Half dreaming, half planning, the young painter thus walked down the streets and up the streets, feeling constantly for the prince's precious letter in his breast-pocket, and starting several times as a bold, almost

daring thought, flashed through his mind. This idea was to go at once to Punkinton, to conquer Alma by storm, to secure her consent to an immediate marriage, and to start with her for Italy! He could not but hope that Alma would at once agree with him and follow him willingly. It appeared to him as if he had a kind of property-claim on her; and then he remembered her looks, as if she acknowledged him now already as her one great Lord and Master on earth, whom she was bound to follow.

After wandering many hours thus absorbed in a thousand day-dreams, he reached at last the house where the painter lived, and went up-stairs firmly resolved to do what he had promised the Baroness Blank to do.

The family, father, mother and three children, were sitting at the table. Edward accepted the kind invitation to join them, and asked where Alma was.

"That girl will make me rich," said the painter. "I have copied her face seven times;—once as a genuine portrait—and that brought me three hundred dollars. Then I have her as a Tyrolese girl fighting against the French troops; twice she is Gretchen kneeling before the Holy Mother's image."

"Has she been here all the time?"

"Oh, no! All that was done after her first sitting."

"She is in Punkinton," added Mrs. Lehman, "and seems to be in the right place there. They are very pleased with her, and she wrote very gratefully from there, but never adding any message for you." At these words the worthy lady looked at Edward with a shy smile. "And when will the wedding be, Mr. Frank?" she added, smiling again.

Edward raised his eyebrows and looked at Mrs. Lehman in a manner which first made her marvel, and then caused her to laugh heartily.

“What?” she asked, “was I right after all? Is it all over?”

Edward had to tell his story, which he made as brief as he could. The painter sighed, and then filled all the wine-glasses. “Poor, poor friend! A quiet glass,” he ordered. “It must be terrible to walk single and alone through life, after one has seen the altar and the priest and the bride so near! And I who had been hoping that it would be my privilege to adorn your rooms in such style after you should have married that rich heiress!”

“He is an idle, frivolous talker, my husband, Mr. Frank. Don’t you mind him!” said Mrs. Lehman, and smiled all love and devotion at Mr. Lehman.

It was on the same day, a fair, bright Autumn day, that Alma came home towards sunset. She had carried a message from the worthy minister of Punkinton to his maids, who were busy in the out-lying fields. As she crossed the little primitive bridge which separates Punkinton and the parsonage from the meadows, she paused a moment to look upon the peaceful scene before her, where the cozy, ivy-crowned house was lying in the golden rays of the setting sun. Surrounded by a large orchard, filled with trees almost bending under the burden of red and golden apples, of luscious, late plums and fragrant pears, it lay there half ensconced, a picture of blessed peace, and pure, well-earned happiness. And as she looked, she remembered, shuddering, the danger from which she had so recently and narrowly escaped, and thanked her Father in Heaven who had led her to such a safe harbor. The kitchen, the dairy and the orchard had been made her special domain, and they gave her labor enough to fill up the sadly shortening days. The household was a very modest one, and yet it was larger than usual, as, from the nature of the endowments of the church, the incumbent was compelled to

cultivate nearly a hundred acres of land. This had naturally suggested the keeping of a small boarding-school, by means of which the surplus productions could be consumed on the spot. These boys, five in number, received here a thorough and strictly religious education.

Like all boys, they also gave trouble at times, and like them, Alma's duties likewise were not roses without thorns, and the wind blowing around the peaceful parsonage was often a very cold, cutting wind. She felt often that she was kindly, very kindly treated, but that after all she was, and remained a stranger. And the minister also, and his wife on their side, could not help feeling that in receiving Alma they had admitted into their modest household a being far superior to the products of the soil, a girl who had grown up in another atmosphere, and who needed another sun and moon and stars than those that were shining here. When they saw Alma's beauty and watched her graceful motions, they could not resist the impression that this girl's place was not in the dairy, nor in the orchard, nor in the kitchen, although they could not deny that she was in all these places the most industrious and at the same time the most skilful of all the girls they had ever had. Often the parson's good wife had it on her tongue to warn the girl that she really ought not to dress so much in her modest condition, and then, just in time, came to her the conviction that after all Alma was not dressed in the least. Not a bow, not a ribbon could she find in Alma's costume that was in the least objectionable, or that any other girl might not be found to wear precisely in the same way; and the plain dress, reaching high up to the throat, as well as the almost puritanically severe simplicity with which her hair was arranged, were certainly not tokens of vanity or a desire to please.

Alma Betty could not well escape from feeling these objections made to her whole being and way of living, and often felt grieved that with all her efforts she could not find the way to the hearts of her benefactors. This made her life sad and lonely—it was in fact the life of a plant that has been moved away from its native home, and is expected to thrive in a foreign soil and under another sky.

Thus she was now gazing, half sadly and half mournfully, across the garden, at the house under whose sheltering roof she had found so sweet a home, and a wave of indistinct longing swept over her thoughts. What was it she yearned for?

“Oh, he is far too great and good for me!” she said to herself. “How can I dare think of him?—and yet, I might be his servant! I could wait on him, clean his room, attend to his linen, provide his meals for him—oh! how happy it would make me merely to be near him! He is the only man on earth who is standing nearer to me—the only one of all I have seen whom I should like to obey. And am I really never to see him again? Alas! I am such a lowly, despised and useless being! Nobody asks what I am doing, and all I really do any one else could do as well. There is no use in me—not for him, not for any one.”

While the poor child was thus indulging in useless and unprofitable thoughts, and blamed herself for not being able to forget the man whom she ought to forget, she suddenly started and felt all the blood in her body rush to her heart, for she thought she saw the image of her fancy, the form of Edward Frank, appear for an instant amid the orchard trees near the parsonage. She pressed both her hands upon her heart as if to suppress its furious beating, and gazed, all eagerness, at the mysterious vision. She saw nothing; the form had vanished. But,

see there! Behind that clump of trees—there it was again—it was he—it was Edward Frank! She knew it! She knew too well that lofty figure, that proud walk, that commanding look of the eyes! He seemed to be in search of some one as he was coming up through the garden, and turned his face now to one side and now to the other. Could they have told him at the house that she was out near the meadows? She tried to call out to him that she was here, she tried to run to meet him, but her feet refused to serve her, as her voice had refused just now, and she stood rooted to the place, trembling, and fearing she knew not what.

There! Now he had caught sight of her! He paused all of a sudden, and then he lifted his hat and waved it in the air, and now he came on with rapid strides.

The poor girl closed her eyes; she did not see him, but she felt him come nearer, and she knew not what it was that made her tremble with fear and yet rejoice! It was the feeling of the violet in early spring, which dark shade and damp mists have kept from unfolding the fragrant beauty-bloom, and which now suddenly sees a bright day around it and feels the blessed heat of the sun. Instinctively she knew what he came for, for all at once there was revealed to her the mystery that had made her tremble with fear and exult in joy at the same moment,—and a hidden voice within her called out to her that he also had remained faithful to that sympathy which had sprung up in their hearts at the first meeting. Thus she stood there like a sacrificial lamb, patiently fixing her eyes upon him as he gradually came nearer and nearer, her hands humbly folded across her bosom, motionless and ready to receive either death or life at his hands.

Now he is standing before her. She looked into his eyes, she saw before her that manly, beautiful face which

she had so often conjured up in her day-dreams and at night, and her whole heart melted away under his glance.

She did not utter a sound—nor did he say a word. But how was it?—she never knew. Of a sudden she felt herself held embraced in his strong arms, pressed close to his heart, and his burning lips upon her own—till Heaven itself was revealed to her in that embrace! Both felt as if it never could have been otherwise—as if the future must needs be so for all time to come. Past, Present and Future, were all lost to them in that moment, and they were one from that day on forevermore. They had unconsciously, during the long days and weeks of their separation, passed through that whole protracted time, which generally, with lovers, lies between the first timid glance and the final open avowal of their love. They were at once, by one embrace, dear old friends, with no doubt, no uncertainty and no possible misunderstanding that could ever step between them and imperil their union.

“Do you love me, Alma?” he asked at last.

“I love you!” she simply replied, but her smile was a smile of angelic sweetness and bliss.

He put his strong arm around her waist, and thus led her, her head resting on his shoulder, slowly through the winding walks of the fragrant garden.

“Will you be mine?” he asked again.

“Yes, I will, with all my heart!”

“And you will go with me wherever I go?”

“I hope for nothing more blissful on earth!”

“Well, then, come and let us talk sense!”

But that was more easily proposed than done. He could not see these dark eyes so full of love, these carnation red lips, nor this beautiful soft hair, without pressing his lips upon them, and it took a long time before he

could tell her, in order, what he proposed doing. He also told her that there were people now who claimed having parental claims upon her, and that he intended to avail himself of their assistance in order to trace her descent as far as it would be found possible. She cast down her eyes and blushed as he spoke thus, and in silence listened to his account. The idea of meeting a mother moved her heart deeply—it seemed almost too much happiness for an earth-born creature like herself to recover a mother and to be blessed with a lover at the same time. She looked up to him with eyes streaming with tears, but they were tears of joy and happiness, such as she had never yet shed in her whole life.

And yet there was here also, as in all events that befall us on earth, a drop of bitterness not wanting in the cup they were draining. As the happy lover gazed and gazed into the features of his beloved one, he could not help being struck by the growing resemblance between Lily and Alma Betty. It was perhaps not so much the precise cut of the features, still soft and undecided in the face of the young girl, but almost harsh and relentless in that of the older woman, but there was something in the look of the eye, in the sound of the voice, and above all in the motions of the body, that was common to both, and almost beyond doubt testified to the common blood.

In the meantime the good people of the parsonage had begun to wonder what could have befallen their young guest. One of the boys, however, who had shown Edward the way to the garden, soon after he had come from the station, now reported the arrival of a fine-looking young man, and the minister's wife, very indignant at what appeared to her suspicious mind very much like a clandestine meeting, called out Alma's name through the open window. She was not a little astonished when her call was almost immediately answered by the sudden

appearance of Alma hanging on the young man's arm, and her amazement grew when the latter coolly informed her that he had obtained Alma's hand and heart, and hoped ere long to carry her to his own home. A letter from Mr. and Mrs. Lehman accredited him with the worthy minister, and the good people, greatly rejoicing at the happy issue of Alma's short-lived sufferings, and at the actual romance happening before their eyes, cordially wished the young people joy and great happiness in life.

It was the finest evening that Edward had yet spent on earth, and Alma felt as if she were in one of the outer courts of Heaven. The lovers sat side by side at the frugal table, and enjoyed the simple meal prepared by Alma's skilful hands, with a feeling of silent but intense happiness, which only he can realize who has ever foreseen in the charming betrothed the genuine helpmate of married life. After supper the whole family—including even the boys, who gazed with admiration at the stalwart man who was to carry off their Lady of Beauty like one of the knights of old—assembled in the school-room, where the children and all the servants had already gone. The daughter played on the modest little house-organ, accompanying with uncommon skill the fresh and full voices that were led by the minister himself, while Edward and Alma contributed strength and melody by their well-trained, excellent voices. It was an indescribable joy to Edward to be able to be present at such a meeting, where sincere devotion and solemn reverence united to make all feel as if for the time at least they were raised high above the daily, vulgar life of our earthly existence and felt nearer the God-head. That from time to time Alma would raise her cast-down eyelids, and glance from the folded hands in her lap to his face, accompanying the stealthy look with a sweet smile, only

made him feel happier and more grateful to God who had given him this pearl of great price !

At last the hour approached when the last train to Berlin passed the little station in the village. Edward left the house after a last kiss in the dark garden, and soon found himself in the haven which he desired.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FAITHFUL AND OBEDIENT.

When Edward reached the little town in which Alma had spent the first years of her earthly existence, he met at first with some difficulties. The woman whose address had been given him had left the place after the child's disappearance, and it gave him some trouble to discover her present residence. At last he found that she had met with misfortunes and was now living in Leipzig, where she kept a second- or third-rate beer-saloon, having married a fellow-servant who joined his savings to hers and thus enabled them to buy a stand just become vacant by the death of the late owner.

Doctor Comet's death was known to her, and she did not hesitate, partly allured by the promise of a handsome reward, partly alarmed by the threat of a charge of abduction, to reveal the secret entrusted to her discretion. She confessed that Doctor Comet had brought her the child when a mere baby ; that she had received a regular salary from him up to that day when the people, out of whose hands she had finally succeeded in escaping, had taken her from them, pretending that they came as Doctor Comet's agents. She also handed Ed-

ward a number of letters, which fully corroborated her statements. Thus provided with all that was needed to establish Alma's identity, he returned to Berlin. It was with a heavy heart that he set out on his way to Lily's house, for he could not conceal from himself how perilous for Alma the intimacy with such a mother must become. The atmosphere of richly-gilded and sweetly-perfumed corruption that pervaded the dwelling of the Blanks, appeared to him, now that he had learned to appreciate Alma's purity and almost holiness, as dangerous in the extreme, and pernicious. Then it occurred to him what kind of people were apt to appear at the entertainments given in that house, and what very objectionable men and women alike Alma would be inevitably compelled to meet there. He thought that Lily no doubt had for the present the very best intentions, as far as her child was concerned, that she might even have the will and the strength of mind entirely to break with the past and her former life. But he knew, also, that almost as a matter of course, the old habit would assert its great power, and Alma would, ere long, be surrounded and courted by men whose mere touch was poison. Lily might even, in the course of time, come to use the beauty of her daughter as a magnet to attract men with high titles and long rent-rolls, and thus to increase the attractions of her salon, and the profits she derived from the play that was going on there almost every night.

Besides all this, he was feverishly anxious to have Alma near him and to make her his helpmate for life. His favorite project now was to found a new home for Alma and himself in Italy, under the patronage of Prince Pallavicini—and what was to become of this if the Baroness Blank claimed the rights of a mother?

In this painful state of mind he did not feel inclined

to stop in Berlin, and to see the lady at all, but thought he would go through and hasten on to Punkinton, there to settle the matter at once, and from Alma's lips and eyes to receive new inspiration as to what was wisest to do in such a strange position. The good minister and his hospitable wife, although not a little surprised at seeing him return so promptly, received him most kindly—Alma with radiant eyes and blushing cheeks. Immediately after the first exchange of the usual courtesies, he begged Alma, as they were walking from the station to the parsonage, to discuss with him very carefully the state of affairs, as far as their mutual position was affected by his experience with the baroness. Hand in hand they paused at last on the very spot where Alma had first seen Edward approach, and where she had recognized him after their separation.

“My darling,” he said to her, holding her hands and looking trustingly into her open, candid eyes, in which he read her very soul, “my darling, I cannot bear to think of you as an inmate of that house. I see you already in a charming modern costume, very *décolletée*, your beautiful hair frizzed and dressed to rise mountain high, surrounded by gentlemen old and young, who tell you flattering compliments till you will demand them as naturally as your daily bread !”

“That you will never see !” she said vehemently.

“And how will you avoid it ?” he asked. “Habit is a powerful tyrant. If you are once inured to the ways of that house you will never be able to get away again. Oh ! if you could remain here, in this quiet but happy home of a minister of God, where peaceful piety reigns and God's blessing so evidently rests on all ! Can you—will you stay here, my beloved, till the happy hour comes when I can return and take you from here straight to the altar—there to make you mine, mine own—never to leave

you again—to be your support and protection, as you will be my pride and my happiness? What do you say?”

She only looked at him so trustingly and sweetly that he felt all words would be superfluous, and the pressure of her hand was to him a sacred pledge.

As they still were standing there, unwilling to leave a place that was fast becoming sacred to them, a small white cloudlet appeared at a distance, skirted the slope of a ridge of hills on the other side of the little creek that flowed through the meadows, and gradually approached nearer and nearer. “The train,” she said, noticing how his eye followed the wandering white cloud, “the same train by which you came four days ago. Every day since then I have been standing here at this hour, recalling one by one, with indescribable enjoyment, every feature of our meeting, to the last moment of greatest, of unspeakable happiness—when you held me here in your loving arms.”

The train entered the station, and Edward and Alma were slowly sauntering through the garden toward the parsonage, stopping now and then at some of the flower-beds that were more specially Alma’s pets, when she suddenly stopped and pointing at the garden gate, said to him :

“See there ! We are going to have visitors !”

Edward looked up and saw at the gate a lady in most fashionable costume, who no sooner saw him than she hurriedly approached. He could not suppress a slight cry of surprise, and when Alma looked at his face, she saw that he had turned very pale. “What is it ?” she asked.

“It is your mother !” said Edward, in a subdued tone of voice.

“Ah,” exclaimed Alma, rapidly advancing two steps, and then remaining as if petrified, as she saw this

elegant lady of haughty presence, with her rapid gesture and her feverishly heated cheeks and eyes. At last, half joyous and half afraid, she advanced to welcome her.

The baroness had spent the days following her meeting with Edward in daily increasing excitement. For hours and hours she would walk up and down in her rooms, now listening for footsteps, now running to the window to see if anybody was coming; then again walking in unnatural unrest. Every now and then she stepped to the portrait, and with the aid of a large mirror, compared most minutely their features, now seeing a striking resemblance, and then again finding far too great a difference to justify any kinship. She could not sleep at night, the thought of her lost daughter filling her mind with ever-changing scenes from the life of the forsaken child. She lost her appetite at morning, noon and evening, and the sight of her husband became so unbearable to her that she shut herself up in her own room and refused to see him or any one else, excepting only her own confidential maid. How vividly she recalled, in these painful, silent hours, the picture of her parental home, where she, the fairest of three fair sisters, practised unchecked the tyranny of her selfishness and her unbridled caprices, spoilt by a father whose frivolity and want of self-respect carried the family down with him into destruction and disgrace. She saw him distinctly standing before her mind's eye, with his sharp, aristocratic features, his sunken cheeks and watery, worn-out eyes, his eagle nose, and lofty brow covered with a thousand minute lines, she saw him rub his snowy-white, beautifully-shaped hands, so deft in shuffling or in drawing cards. He had always told her that his Lily was his last great trump in life, for whom on that account no expenditure had ever been spared. She had ever been permitted to do just as she liked, and no control had ever been

attempted for fear of affecting her temper, and through her humor her complexion, and through that her beauty,—the one precious jewel this old, reduced family could still call their own. And then rose before her the greatest guilt of which she was conscious, in the shape of that unfortunate man who had taken his life on her account. That scene in the little glass house on top of the roof! No, she could not bear it! She hid her face in her hands and shuddered and shook, till at last she summoned courage, rang the bell for a servant and ordered some wine to be brought. She filled a large goblet and drank it at one draught, not knowing what she was drinking; but she felt a new glow in her veins and new strength in her heart, so that she could once more defy the shades of the departed to come and trouble her mind's peace.

From all such visions, from all such horrors, she felt as if she could take refuge at the picture of her child, that appeared to her almost a sanctuary. She swore that no power on earth should ever lure her away from this chaste and pure young creature, and she vowed as solemnly that from the moment of her entrance into her house, no man or woman of ambiguous character should ever again be allowed to darken her doorway.

Three long, endless days she lived in this state of painful, harrassing excitement, but on the fourth she determined that she would wait no longer, but go herself to that village of which the lover had spoken so eloquently, and where, she shrewdly suspected, a part of the secret, at least, might be concealed. Without saying a word to any one, she drove to the station, took a ticket to Punkinton, and as we have seen, appeared there to the utter consternation of all parties.

Here she now found herself facing the girl on whom depended her future and the hoped-for amends for a great sin. Edward's presence and the whole manner of

the two left her no longer any doubt as to the identity of her daughter.

But this woman who had all her life long allowed the evil spirits within her to rule over the good spirits, and who had in a feverish thirst for excitement consumed the principal of her vital power, was now to be taught that nature is not disregarded with impunity, and that the laws of our being bear their fulfilment in themselves.

After the first joyous sensation, as is so often the case with natures like hers, the reality disappointed her fanciful anticipations. Her overwrought nerves were not able to enjoy this happiness in its simple reality. She had forgotten to be a mother! She imagined that Alma's welcome was cold, that her face even bore signs of aversion. Thus she remained for some time standing with outspread arms before her daughter, as if maternal joy were a royal garment with which she dared not cover her poor thin shoulders. When at last she took a step forward and embraced the child, who looked at her in consternation, her face was deadly pale, and big tears raced down her cheeks.

Edward witnessed the scene with deep emotions, but he also had to defend himself against a painful sensation. He felt as if a falcon was holding the dove in its fangs. Here in the open air and the bright sunlight he was forcibly struck by the aged and worn-out, ash-colored face of the mother. She bore the seal of Babylon. Here were the two fair beings facing each other, with an unmistakable resemblance between them—but what a difference! Edward felt more forcibly than ever how little he would desire to see the two united.

He left mother and daughter for awhile to themselves, and went into the house to tell the minister and his wife that the Baroness Blank had arrived. The old man,

with unfailing courtesy, at once went to invite the newcomer to his house.

It was a strange visitor,—such as the parsonage had probably but rarely received under its sheltering roof. The room in its puritanic simplicity, with its simple furniture and plain wood-cuts, made a strange contrast to the air of fashion and of luxury that swept in with the guest. The poor, simple wife of the minister stood almost aghast when she beheld these sparkling eyes, this rich and artistic coloring of the complexion, this eccentric, unnatural hair-structure, and the unwonted magnificence of silk and satin which exhaled a subtle perfume. The baroness held Alma by the hand as she entered the room, and first turned to Edward, thanking him for the great joy she owed him. Then she spoke to her host, and thanked him and his good wife for whatever love and affection they had shown her beloved child, and wound up by requesting that Alma's trunk might at once be gotten ready and sent to the station, as her daughter would, of course, accompany her on her return to Berlin.

Edward turned at once to his betrothed, asking how that was?

She blushed lightly, but said without hesitation, and turning her frank, open face to the baroness :

“Pardon me, dear mamma, but please do not ask that of me! I wish for the present to remain here.”

The mother trembled.

“So soon? So soon?” she said, rather speaking to herself than to the bystanders. “What do you mean by saying ‘for the present?’”

Alma walked up to Edward, and seizing his hands, she said bravely :

“My heart is his who has rescued me, and he is shortly to make me his wife, and then to take me with him to Italy.”

The unfortunate mother put her hand to her heart as if she felt there a keen, sharp pain, and pressed her lips together. But shaking her head as if that was all that was needed, she said calmly :

“My child, you will please from this day follow your mother’s advice and no other.”

“My very honored lady,” said Edward, “permit me to confirm the words of my betrothed. We have agreed, Alma and I, to become one. We have confessed our love to each other, and sworn to act in concert. It is my wish that my betrothed remain a few weeks longer in this house, until we can marry, and then we shall, if God permits, go together to Italy, where I have influential friends and the offer of erecting a large building.”

The lady breathed heavily.

“And you, my child, what say you?” she asked, in a hoarse voice.

“My will is the will of my betrothed, and I obey him absolutely,” replied Alma, in a firm tone.

“It is not possible,” whispered the poor mother to herself, passing her tightly gloved hands again and again over her brow ; “it is surely not possible !” She felt at this moment as if she saw the man whom she had driven to death standing once more before her and conjuring her to love him. She remembered her triumph when she had shown him how much she was the stronger of the two, and now she saw the vengeance approach from which she could not escape ! She tried to brace herself and to triumph in this crisis also, but her strength was broken, she could not summon her spirits, and with an imploring gesture she turned to Alma, saying : “It would be so sweet and dear in you, my child, if you would obey me. How long have I longed and yearned to have a child that should turn her pure, innocent face towards mine, and obey me in filial love ! Will you

punish me for having lost all these years of maternal joy and happiness? Am I less your mother because misfortune deprived me so long of all a mother's privileges? Am I only to suffer and to enjoy nothing? Oh, come to my bosom, my dearest, darling child, and follow me!"

Alma stood in deep, painful hesitation, looking now at her unfortunate mother and now at Edward, feeling profound sympathy with the one, and remembering the obedience she had sworn to the other.

Edward once more came to her assistance.

"Baroness," he said, "it can surely be of no use for so short a time to change the whole manner of life of your daughter. I count positively upon marrying in a few weeks, and till then—"

"Till then," she interrupted him, angrily, "you had better not intrude between mother and daughter. Do not inflict upon me now an injury which might make me forget the service you have rendered me. Yes—you need not look at me so reproachfully. I know you have given me back my daughter, but it would be better for me never to have found her at all than to lose her now and forever!"

"Yes, you are right," replied Edward, losing his temper likewise. "I know what you would do. You will never permit Alma to become my wife, and that is the reason why you wish to take her away from here and to your own dwelling."

The mother burst forth into a loud laugh that sounded very uncanny, and then broke out into a new stream of invectives, which she ended with the words: "You want to marry my child! As if I did not know—know but too well—what you men mean by that word 'marry.' To promise her eternal fidelity and love, to vow with solemn oaths before God Almighty to make her happy—and then, under the hypocritical cloak of church-ceremonies

to make her your slave, whom you may ill-treat as it pleases you, deceive, and finally leave altogether!"

"No, mamma, no!" cried Alma with flaming eyes, "that is a crying wrong! No one would speak thus of my betrothed who knows him. He has the purest, noblest heart, and even my mother must not try to render his love suspicious, and—"

The poor mother laughed once more so loud that it resounded all over the house, but in her distorted face wrath was supreme :

"Aha!" she sneered, "that then is your real face which I now see! Before it was only a mask, assumed to preserve peace among us! You fool! Do you know the world as I know it? You pick up the first man that happens to come across your path in life, and to him you give yourself, body and soul! Do you know what marriage really is? A wretched contrivance devised by the Evil One to martyrize sensitive souls and to fill hell with maddened criminals. Do you?"

"Stop!" cried the venerable minister, "stop, madame, and consider what you are saying, and in whose presence! You are over-excited, and it seems to me as if your feverish condition carries you away to say words which you do not really mean, and which you will bitterly repent hereafter. Permit me to suggest that we withdraw to my study, where we can, undisturbed and in a Christian mood, discuss this grave question."

Suddenly wringing her hands and uttering two or three piercing cries, to the horror of all the bystanders, she threw herself at the feet of her child, embraced her knees, and cried, "My child! my only child! If you will save my life, my mind here below, my peace in the great Hereafter, come to me and trust me! Never was child loved by its mother as I love you. You shall be my only happiness in life, my only hope for the future. How

can you forsake me? You are my flesh and blood, you are my child, the one sheet-anchor that binds me yet to earth. Will you kill me in cold blood?"

Alma bowed low before her mother, but felt utterly helpless, and the appalling silence that immediately succeeded this terrific outburst, of passion, was felt by all as if it would crush them. Alma at last made an effort to stammer a few words; she tried to say: "Pardon me, my dear mother, pardon me—but I cannot divide my heart, and I must follow the man whom I love!"

With these words she turned aside, threw herself into Edward's arms, and sobbed there convulsively.

The baroness uttered a heart-rending cry that pierced everybody's innermost soul. They saw with grief and pain how this poor woman suffered, having no idea of God's greatness and goodness, who had put all her hopes of happiness on the head of this child of hers, and must now see how her own offspring turned from her, if not with loathing, certainly without that affection which Nature implants in every heart. The poor girl, clinging closely to her betrothed, felt clearly that it needed her whole great love for him to keep her from yielding to that sympathy which prompted her to throw herself into her mother's arms and to promise her to be hers forevermore! But her love was too great and her nature too simple not to enable her to come forth triumphantly from this terrible trial.

The worthy minister and his wife tried their best to calm the excited, unfortunate mother, and used every argument that their religion and their reason suggested to them, to persuade her to wait and to leave to time the gradual bridging over of the abyss which for the moment separated the child from the mother. But all was in vain; a dark spirit seemed to possess the unfortunate woman, and rigid and apparently unfeeling, she listened

to all that was said. At a sign of the minister Edward and Alma left the room, and almost instantly the spell seemed to be broken. The poor woman sank fainting into the arms of the old gentleman and his wife.

In the little church of Punkinton great preparations had been made and the golden autumnal sun, sending its rays through the rich, stained windows, produced strange combinations with the wreaths and garlands that hung around, and the rich carpets that lay on the cold stone floor.

Under the sheltering shade of the avenue of old linden trees, which led from the parsonage to the church-door, a small festive procession was slowly making its way, the ground being strewn with the gorgeous colors of millions of autumn leaves, interspersed with modest flowers, the tribute of the children of the parish.

The bride, in her long white veil falling from under the myrtle-wreath on her head to the train of her bridal dress, looked thoughtful but happy. With proud steps Edward followed her closely.

The sound of the bell with its merry carols following the solemn charge, died away ; organ music and sacred chants filled the church, and finally the binding words of the priest, and the blessing of the Almighty, ended and confirmed the loving union of two happy hearts.

Then, almost immediately after the ceremony, a train carried the happy young couple towards the south, to that far-famed spot of transcendent beauty on the blue Tyrrhenian sea.

True, there lay a light shadow on Alma's happy features, whenever she thought of the unfortunate mother, and recalled that fatal evening on which the sad sufferer had been compelled to leave the parsonage and to return to Berlin without the long lost daughter. But the farther

the train carried them away from their childhood's home, the paler grew the Past and the brighter and fairer appeared the Present.

CHAPTER XXV.

MONACO.

Alfonse had provided himself in Paris with a large sum of ready money and a considerable amount in letters of credit ; he had fitted himself out with all the comforts of a modern traveler, and, besides, busied himself with learning all he could hear of the life led by the Prince de Lignac and his new Princess. Two such brilliant personages, with the additional prestige of a historical name on his side, and, if report was true, of many millions on her part, could not well appear, even in Parisian society, without attracting attention. Hence he easily heard what he wished to ascertain, together with the fact that they had only a few days before gone down to Monaco, where they were to spend the winter months.

Alfonse at once concluded to follow them, bent as he was upon keeping close to his faithless lady-love and cousin. He had at first intended to remain some time in Paris, and to enjoy the attractions of the Metropolis till they should pall upon his palate. But while there a kind of disgust suddenly seized him ; he no longer enjoyed the famous restaurants, his mistresses behind the scenes wearied him. An inner unrest marred every pleasure, and the very gold for which he had so grievously sinned, no longer was able to furnish enjoyment. The memory of his parents, and the last events in Berlin, tormented him

and robbed the delights of Paris of all attractive power. The incessant movement on the boulevard, the long palace-lined streets, the merry crowds, and even the incessant traffic in the humbler parts of the gigantic city—all this appeared to him tedious and unrefreshing. He constantly felt in his pockets to make sure that his precious bonds and parchments were still there, and frequently looked around, fancying that he was followed and watched. Even the hope of finding Chessa once more, assumed now, when he was so near the realization of his day-dreams, a paler hue.

In this unsatisfied state of mind he kept in motion all day long, visiting churches and chapels, museums and galleries, drove out to see the surrounding country—in fact he worked as hard at seeing Paris as if Badeker was employing him to prepare a new edition of his hand-book of Paris. Nothing gave him the slightest satisfaction—nothing except one thing; he appreciated Véfour's cook and the widow Cliquot's last composition. One night, however, he had a most fearful dream in which Chessa appeared to him, and, to his amazement, in hearty friendship with the Turkish Interpreter, attempted his life with the very dagger he had once seen in her hands. When he awoke, it was with a piercing cry of anguish.

He made a light. The cold perspiration was dropping from his clammy forehead. It was two o'clock in the morning. He could not get calm for some time, his whole nervous system having evidently received a shock from which he seemed to be unable to recover.

It was in fact not till later in the evening, when he found himself comfortably engaged in a new novel which he was reading by the electric light in the coupé, with a hundred thousand francs in gold and bank notes in his pocket, and the prospect of seeing, the next day, the

nearest approach to an earthly paradise. It was then only that he felt himself again.

There were two other travelers in the same coupé with him, whose conversation after awhile attracted his attention, simply because they discussed the place to which he was going. One of them, a short, stout man, with gray hair, bright eyes, and carefully-kept beard, looked like an old soldier. The other was evidently an eminent divine, whose fine features, and clear, commanding eyes were very attractive. He had, it appeared, some duties to perform in Monaco, while the military man was on his way to Marseilles.

“The prince will find himself, after all, compelled to give his consent,” said the black-eyed Frenchman. “The Holy Father himself has dissolved the tie.”

The priest—he might have been a cardinal, so imperious was his carriage—first looking at Alfonse, who was lying in his corner apparently utterly indifferent to what they were saying, said :

“I beg your Excellency’s pardon, but the Holy Father cannot grant a divorce, since our Church knows no such measure. The College of Cardinals, it is true, have declared this marriage to be non-existent according to Canon Law, as there was practically no marriage between the hereditary prince and Lady Hamilton. The Holy Father has, after careful inquiry, given his approval to this decision ; that is all.”

“How could a marriage be declared non-existent when there was an offspring of such marriage alive?”

“The idea of marriage pre-supposes the free consent of both parties ; in this case it was conclusively established that the lady had been married against her will.”

“In France that could not have been possible. The *Code Civil* is very clear on that question, and in recent suits the principle has been reasserted.”

The priest shrugged his shoulders. "The Church is and always will be above the *Code Civil*," he said, "and reserves the right of annulling or supporting a marriage, as its interest may demand. Divorce, however, as the world calls it, the Church will never admit, because it is contrary to the law of God."

"They raise a loud outcry now against the bank at Monaco, and I think justly. What does your Eminence think of it?"

"I think it is pure hypocrisy," said the priest, with that fine, ironical smile that seems to be given to the higher members of the Roman Hierarchy as a special weapon. "It is the same hypocrisy which robbed Baden-Baden of its privileges."

"What do you say?"

"Do not misunderstand me," resumed the priest. "What I think of the immorality of gambling, I trust I need not tell you. But as long as there is in every large city of Europe an Exchange at which men can, by exactly the same process, in a few days or even hours, win and lose as much as they choose to risk, so long can we not blame Monaco any more than Paris or Berlin."

"Your Eminence might go further than that, and acknowledge that this outcry would not be listened to by a human soul, if the Prince of Monaco would only have the kindness to let a small fraction of the revenues of the bank fall into the pockets of certain men in Paris, instead of offering the Sacred Congregations an asylum in his little principality. Nobody ever *speaks* of the *Cerdes* in Nice, where the Prefect, the General in command, and the Admiral from Villefranche sit at the green table and play to their hearts' content."

Thereupon the two gentlemen entered into a lively discussion of the relative merits and demerits of certain

modes of gambling, which had the happy effect upon Alfonse that he fell fast asleep and did not awake till the train ran into the beautiful station at Monaco. Here he secured rooms at the Hotel de Paris almost adjoining the Casino of Monte Carlo.

His room had a view over the magnificent gardens of the Casino and down the sudden precipice of the rocks to the deep blue Mediterranean. He inquired at once after Prince Lignac, and was told that he had a villa on the other side of the *Avenue du Casino*. Then he dressed, and, military fashion, went out to acquaint himself with the locality. The verandahs and the avenues in the splendid garden of the hotel were crowded, this fine, starlit evening, with a great host of well-dressed, well-behaved people. After awhile the moon rose, and Alfonse, who just then had reached the large, open square in front, thought he had never in his life seen such lights and such an enchanting scene. The façade of the Casino seemed to reflect the silvery light of the moon, which fell full upon the white marble with its rich gold ornamentation, and the snowy gravel under foot, while the fragrance of innumerable orange trees mingled here with the faint smell of the salt air. This marvelous light lent to the palm trees, figs and olive trees, and other tropical plants and shrubs, fairy-like charms, perfectly new and almost bewitching to the less favored son of Northern Germany. All the languages of Europe seemed to be spoken in those little groups which were scattered over the grounds or merrily wandered from one attractive point to another. Little clouds of Turkish tobacco rose here and there like incense-offering from various groups, and over the whole night spread gradually a thin, transparent veil, which gave the enchanting scene, as it were, its finishing touch, and made it resemble more

the creation of an overwrought imagination than a reality.

Alfonse sauntered slowly across the great square, crossed the broad street which lead straight to the central door of the Casino, and plunged into the bosquets of the other side, between which he soon saw brilliant lights shine out from the vestibule and the long windows of a villa, which he guessed to be occupied by Prince Lignac. There was, on the right, the little gorge, down which a clear, murmuring creek fell in skilfully devised cascades, which shone silvery white and bright in the brilliant moonlight ; there was on the other side the glass-covered *porte cochère*, where at that moment a carriage was standing that brought guests ; and there was on the Eastern face the beautiful *loggia*, brightly illumined with countless glass balls and electric lights, in which a large crowd was assembled.

Alfonse approached till he could lean on an immense century plant, which guarded, as it looked, the entrance from the park into the private garden. From here he commanded a near view of this whole side of the villa, in which all the rooms were brilliantly lighted, for the prince seemed to entertain this evening. Absorbed in dark dreams, full of bitter feelings and savage hatred, Alfonse was watching the brilliant scene. Then of a sudden a bell-like voice arose, accompanied by a piano, and he could, holding his breath, follow every note of the *Casta Diva*, the air which was Chessa's favorite song ever since he had praised the exquisite delicacy of her method.

He was so entirely absorbed in listening to the song, and in watching the brilliant scene before him, that he did not notice a slight, slender figure, which suddenly turned up near him from the dark shrubbery, and observed him with eyes glowing with passion. Then the

ghost-like appearance cast one more eager look at the villa and disappeared again, soundless as he had come. Alfonse returned to his hotel, sad and dreary, and tried to learn all he could hear of the prince and his special friends and acquaintances.

The next afternoon he made his way to the pigeon-shooting, of which the prince was said to be a passionate patron and daily visitor. Paying but little attention to the skilfully contrived terraces on which, at an outlay of many millions, the famous gardens of Monte Carlo had been established, he walked rapidly through this earthly paradise, and then descended the stairs which conduct the visitor—for a consideration—to the narrow edge of land along the shore. Here the subdued sounds of firing guided his footsteps, until he came to a company of about thirty gentlemen, all armed with regulation-rifles. At the first glance it could be seen that these men were not what was called the *crème de la crème*. In the centre stood Prince Lignac, in his exquisitely simple and unpretending costume, with his haughty, high-bred carriage, his fine ironical smile ever playing around his finely-cut lips, in strange contrast with his melancholy blue eyes.

Alfonse went straight up to him, and spoke to him, with open, unreserved pleasure, and expressed his surprise at finding him here. A look of displeasure and distrust appeared for a moment in the prince's eyes, but he was so perfectly master of himself that it vanished instantly, and Alfonse thought he must have been mistaken.

The prince at once introduced him to the leading sportsmen, like himself great patrons of any pleasant way that would enable them to lose or to win money, to kill time, and quite ready to welcome any man who shared their views of life and their amusements.

“I wonder,” said Prince Lignac, “that the good people of Monaco have not objected yet to our special pastime. We kill here every day some three or four hundred pigeons, and right in face of us there stands that little toy of a church, the church of St. Dévote, in whose honor they celebrate every year the greatest festival of their church. You know, no doubt, the legend, how one day a white dove appeared in sight of a ship that was on the point of being wrecked and dashed to pieces. ‘Behold the soul of St. Dévote,’ cried the pilot, ‘let us follow the bird!’ They did so and were saved, and where this happened there the faithful believers afterwards built that pretty church. Who now can warrant the good people of Monaco that the worthy soul of the strange Saint does not one of these days by chance take the form of one of our birds, and what will then be the feelings of the unlucky man who has shot St. Dévote?”

They laughed, and one of the young men told the prince not to neglect his chance, as it was his turn next. He stepped to the appointed place, and took aim. Chance would have it that a snow-white pigeon flew out of the opened cage at that moment, and rose joyously into the blue ether. The prince, too proud, like common shooters, to catch the bird unawares, as it were, at the moment when it spreads its wings for the first time after leaving the cage, let the bird rise some hundred feet or more, and then fired. But—what could have happened to the expert sportsman, who boasted that he never missed a bird? He fired, but the bird rose higher and higher; the prince at once fired the other barrel, and this time with better success. The poor bird fell, one wing was evidently injured; a few seconds it struggled to gain command of its wings and the next moment it dropped into the sea. The young men immediately examined accurately where it had fallen; it lay outside the railing which here

marks the *rayon*, and hence was not credited to the prince's account—it was *mauvais*, because only the birds that fall upon the rocky slope within the *rayon* are called good.

The prince was annoyed by the failure.

“The Saint Dévôte has avenged herself,” sneered a tall Englishman, who was his most dangerous rival for the great prize.

“No, I think Lignac wants to found a new Society for the Protection of Animals,” laughed one of the young dukes, *société colombophile*.

“Well,” said the prince, “you may call that a joke, but ever since I read my friend Beauvoir's exquisite verses, stating that Venus needed only two doves to draw her cars, I have had my scruples about our killing every year ten thousand of them or more. Unless,” he added, speaking seriously, “some one of you should invent a Marsala sauce in which they might be cooked as a well-peppered ragout.”

A magnificent dinner, for which two *cordons bleus* from Paris had vied with each other to produce, by joint efforts, the most exquisite dishes, united the same company once more at eight in the evening. Alfonse was an invited guest at this Lucullian meal, and was delighted to find himself surrounded by men whose banner bore but the one motto—pleasure! This atmosphere served to drown his scruples and conscientious remembrances, which would turn up and mingle with the joyous shouts and peals of laughter that never ceased. He derived a strange comfort from the conviction that he was among men not one of whom was probably better than himself, and who yet belonged to the highest classes of society.

After dinner, which was not prolonged beyond the usual hour, all adjourned to the Casino, where they rejoined the ladies. Alfonse was in great excitement; he

hoped every moment to meet Chessa; but she was not there, and Prince Lignac offered his arm to a tall, red-haired English woman, with a high instep, enormous teeth, and a most enterprising air. With her he lost himself in the darker parts of the gardens, while most of his friends tried their luck at one or the other of the crowded tables. Alfonse walked from room to room, enjoying the low humming and murmuring, chiming in as it did with the ring of gold and silver and the rustling of silks, while from the gardens strange, sweet perfumes entered in at the tall, open windows. But where was she? She loved gold, as he knew but too well, but she did not play to-night.

“You do not play?” he was asked by an American, whose acquaintance he had made at dinner, and who was now carrying two ladies to the table where they wished to lose—or to win?—a few gold pieces.

“I never play against the bank,” replied Alfonse, “unless the banquier should be willing to sacrifice the teros and the doubles, and in faro the two last cards.”

“Ah, but then you would have the advantage which the bank now has!” laughed the American.

“The banquier would still have the advantage,” replied Alfonse.

“How will you prove that?”

“Ah! never mind now. I have studied the subject, and it is as I tell you.”

He went to a window in search of fresh, cool air, and looked down upon the Mediterranean that was lying there at his feet like a black, polished marble floor. Alfonse could not endure the quiet and the calm that reigned down there—it was too painful a contrast with the incessant noise that prevailed up here and all around him. He must do something to overcome his growing nervousness. He put his hand into his pocket and drew

out ten gold Napoleons, with which he went to the nearest roulette table, and in defiance of his prudence, proposed to stake that amount. Just then he saw the prince enter, still with the English woman on his arm, and sit down with the air of a man who is perfectly at home. Next he put a pile of blue notes and of larger and smaller gold pieces before him on the table, and this gave Alfonse a peculiar idea. He put his money back into his portemonnaie, got up and quickly left the Casino.

He walked briskly in the direction of the villa, and when he drew nearer, observed a brilliant light which shot through the dark foliage of the park. He began to hope. Soon he reached the railing, near which he had stood the other night listening to her enchanting voice. To-night all was still, but the loggia was illuminated. Two globes of light pink glass, supported by gilt arms, diffused a mild, most becoming light, and in one corner he soon discerned the blue-black hair of the beloved.

She was alone. He meditated a moment, hastened up the steps that led to the loggia, and the next moment he stood before her.

She uttered a low cry and started up

“It is I, Chessa!” he said.

“What do you want?” she asked.

He noticed with astonishment, but great satisfaction, the great change she had undergone. In the few months that had passed since these two had last met, a great and a very mournful change must have taken place in her soul. The expression of her features bore witness to an entire transformation.

“My dear friend,” he said very gently, “are you really frightened by my appearance here? Do I not deserve to be welcomed as an old, trusted friend, when I present myself once more after so long and so painful a separation?”

“That is true,” she said, reclining again on her seat. “You have always been honest and kind to me. Be welcome, then! But why at night? Why so stealthily?”

There was unrest in her voice, which, with her hot red eyes, spoke of great feverish excitement within. He waited a minute, thinking what he should say. Now that he saw that she was not happy, the vague and undefined plan for the future which he had formed, assumed of a sudden, firm and clear outlines. “Can you not guess?” he said at last. “Did I not foresee that you were hastening to your ruin? I followed you to be near you, to watch over you, to be at hand should you ever need me!”

“That is too late now! After having said ‘yes’ at the altar, I was lost forever.”

Alfonse read in her face, in her words, in the sound of her voice, the whole story of her life since she had left him. She stood once more before him, she, the hardened child of the world, the adventurous southerner, with her burning hot eyes, and her cold, reasoning mind, she whose magnificent voice he had tried so hard to endow with a feeling soul.

And yet he who saw so clearly what was hid in her heart, gave himself up to the delusion that he had a place in her heart, that she actually cherished warm feelings for him, and that the hope of possessing her one of these days as his own, his very own, was by no means so very uncertain.

Upon the strength of this visionary conviction, he employed all the powers of persuasion he had ever possessed, to convince the adventuress that she had been victimized by the prince, who had determined to enrich himself at the cost of her life’s happiness. He showed her how cunningly she had been kept in total ignorance of the interest which the old baron and banker had always taken in her—an interest which went so far

that after the death of his son, Baron Liondell had made her the heiress of his whole fortune. The prince, he said, had known this and married her solely for the sake of these millions, of which she had been kept ignorant till after the wedding.

“For he knew very well,” Alfonse concluded, in bitterness of heart, “that you, my poor friend, had the choice among a dozen or two, as soon as it became known whose heiress you had in the meanwhile become. Then you would hardly have contented yourself with a burnt-out crater, called Prince Lignac, with a self-sufficient egotist such as the world does not easily admit a second time.”

Chessa was not delicate enough to take these words amiss, and Alfonse had hit her sore point in thus speaking of the heritage. Never before had she seen so clearly how she had been deceived, how cunning had been the policy of her enemies in telling her of the millions she would inherit, only after she had bound herself to hand them over to this faded, half-exhausted nobleman. In the meantime it had grown late, and the prince's return might be momentarily expected.

Alfonse prepared to leave her in the same way in which he had come, when the artist, forgetting all around her, and staring out into the dark night, said suddenly :

“I felt to-day, before you came, as if ghosts were haunting me. I fancied I saw the ghastly face of that wild Eastern man who attacked me in Berlin, stare at me through the window of the music-room. Since then I have been trembling.”

“Pshaw !” said Alfonse, frightened for a moment ; but sustained by the glowing passion within, he promptly shook off the touch of fear, and said contemptuously :

“Fancy, pure fancy. Am I not here—at your side?”

"Fate is stronger than man," she said. "Good-night."

"Fate is stronger than man," Alfonse repeated to himself, as he walked back to his hotel through the balmy, richly-perfumed night air, "and your fate, my dear Cuban cousin, is now in the hands of a man of cunning. By Jupiter, I have a deft hand! The money of this treacherous old uncle shall bear better interest in my hand, and quicker than in his own. The small sum I made him pay me the other night shall be the bait by means of which I shall catch the whole—and the fair artist into the bargain! And the prince! Well-aday, if he steps between the millions and myself, woe to him! His life shall pay for the attempt! This is a place where people play high, and my motto is just now, *Va banque!*"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ELOPEMENT.

Alfonse's projects, still in dark and dim outline only, found unexpected support in the conduct of the prince himself. After the first uncomfortable feeling caused by Alfonse's unexpected sudden appearance in Monaco had passed away, he seemed rather to be flattered by his devoted attentions to his wife. He even invited him to come often, to chat about old times, and to make music. One day he said in his usual weary way, "I have made the acquaintance of a pretty English girl who has a fancy for Natural History and spends hours daily in catching all kind of sea-vermin that bear a light at night. Now it will be a great comfort to me, if I am sometimes kept

out at sea till late at night, to know that my wife is not alone, but can cultivate her music. You used to help her, I think, did you not? And besides, you are a cousin, I think!"

This was more than was needed to establish relations between Chessa and Alfonse which furnished welcome food for society-gossip, without injuring either party. In the whirlpool of amusement which here, at Monaco, literally swallowed up the richest and greatest of the earth, Chessa and Alfonse met with the same regularity as the prince and his red-haired, insular beauty. The intoxicating atmosphere of this spot on earth which probably surpasses all other places of amusement in the Old World, made the merry guests forget the abyss around which they were daily dancing, with pale Death sitting by and marking his victims. Chessa had led a lonely life till Alfonse came. Her hopes and anticipations in marrying a prince were so bitterly disappointed that she felt crushed by the sternness of the reality, and she withdrew from society as much as the prince would let her. Another reason of her retirement was that she actually suspected the prince of being ashamed of her in the presence of his equals. Their stay in France had been very short, their visits to relations and friends very few, and she thought she discovered that the prince preferred a neutral ground to her company. Now, however, the presence of an old friend, who had been and still pretended to be, a lover, awakened in her new and far more pleasant feelings. The result was terrible; the more she compared the two men, the more unlike she found the prince and the young man, the bitterer grew her hatred against the former. She saw in him, more and more, the clever man, who, by his wicked intrigues, had, in a league with her old and feeble uncle, deprived her of a colossal fortune and made it his own, while he had made

her nominally his wife, but in reality his slave. Decidedly, the prince's shares went down and Alfonse's rose at a tremendous rate.

But Alfonse had wider-reaching plans. It flattered his vanity and pleased his ambition to be daily seen in company with one of the fairest women of Europe—to mingle with the *crème la da crème* on a footing of at least tolerated equality, and to have his share of this gorgeous play-ground for the great of the earth—but he wanted still more. He had enjoyed the marvelous triumph, after being deprived of his love by the prince, to rob in return, the prince of the love of his wife, and now, to crown his wishes, he aimed at nothing less than at robbing him of the wife herself!

After he had been at Monaco some three or four weeks, he had one day a conversation with the prince, which, unknown to the two men, was to lead to a crisis in their lives.

“Yes, quite a nice little place,” said the prince, in his usual quiet but sneering way, as he paused for a moment under a palm tree near the railing of the outer promenade, “and a charming outlook here over the blue sea. But I begin to think it is time to go.”

“What?” said Alfonse, quite taken aback, for he had been fully persuaded that the prince meant to spend the winter here, and till now had never heard any other plan even alluded to.

“You are a lucky man,” continued the prince. “You can go and stay as you like. You have left the army, you live on your income, you have more money than you need—a thing that few people can say of themselves—you are really to be envied.”

“I should have thought, my prince, that you enjoy all these advantage in a far higher degree than I!”

“Do you think so? You are really very kind. But you ought to know I am a married man!”

“I have the honor to know that!” replied Alfonse smiling.

“He who says ‘married,’ says much. You can at any time, in winter or in summer, by day or by night, in the morning or the evening, send for your camels, order them to be loaded, and move on in this desert of our earthly existence as the whim may seize you. But a married man has a second I, whose wishes are laws to him, and who commands. My wife wants to see Paris!”

“Ah! I had not heard of that!”

“You are right to be astonished, my friend. I was astonished when the news reached me. But you will notice that the better you learn to know a woman, the more enigmatical she becomes to you. Here you have no doubt imagined that you knew every fold and every wrinkle in my wife’s face, and yet you did not know that her life’s wish is to see Paris!”

“That may be as it may—still I am surprised at the sudden departure.”

“Yes, we have been here long enough,” said the prince, “and I shall never forget our owing it to you and your charming company that the last weeks have passed so much more pleasantly. It is a great advantage of these watering places that we can socially go about in undress. If I should have the pleasure to see you so amiably interested in the princess in Paris, you know, I should feel compelled to shoot you like a mad dog, although you are her cousin; while here I am only bound to express my gratitude to you for your self-sacrifice.” The prince said this in his usual affected tone, which allowed his words to be taken in earnest or in jest, but he let at the same time a flash escape his eyes that gave Alfonse much food for meditation.

"Is it true," he asked Chessa that evening, when the prince was sitting by the side of his English beauty at the green table, "is it true that you have asked to be taken to Paris and to leave this place, where we have spent so many happy days?"

"What?" she cried frightened. "Did he tell you so? He told me to-day that he found Monaco no longer amusing, and he was getting ready to leave."

"Then it is evident he wants to separate us. He warned me to-day that he was going to assume the part of the insulted husband. He does that to punish you and me. But let us be wiser and bolder at the same time. It is time to come to a decision. If you refuse now you doom yourself to life-long slavery. Believe me."

"Ah," sighed Chessa, clinging closely to her lover, and looking at him passionately with her deep, glowing eyes. "How can we do it?"

He thereupon unfolded his plan to her. She was enchanted, for this was exactly what pleased best her adventurous spirit that was continually thirsting for new things.

He proposed that she should elope with him and then try to obtain a divorce. "If we can obtain a divorce on German soil, no French tribunal will be able to touch your funds in Germany. A divorce, I think, you can easily obtain on the ground of ill-treatment at the hands of the prince. Your fortune is Uncle Liondell's inheritance. He is so old that he cannot possibly live much longer. But I hope, what is far better, we shall win him over to our side, and I should be ineffably happy if we could render his last days more happy than they are likely to be without us. What joy if I could bring him back his niece, hereafter to be his daughter, his true, devoted daughter! He also wished you to be happy, and if we tell him that the prince has made you unhappy, he

will try to make amends for his mistake in giving you the prince as your husband. But if everything should miscarry, if misfortune should pursue us—even then are we two not enough for each other? Who knows, we might amuse ourselves all the better for it. You have a heavenly voice, and if I were to act as your impressario, I think we could do a good business.”

Chessa laughed heartily, and kissed his lips that uttered such frivolous, trifling thoughts so seriously, and an almost wild joy at the thought of startling adventures and a changing fate, filled her with hope and delight.

“You are right, Alfonse! I am tired sitting here and piping in my gilded cage. What do you think, Alfonse? Would it not be a splendid notion to go to America? We’ll give concerts, and these rich Yankees will pay us bushels of gold dollars! Would not that be a glorious life?—every day another city, another people, and always pyramids of flowers and piles of dollars! I’ll go with you! Here is my hand! Now get ready, and let us start as soon as we can.”

They agreed to start the very next night, with only so much luggage as was absolutely necessary; the rest could follow later. They had found out that there was a Genoese steamer in the harbor, which the day after the next would leave Monaco on her way to Naples and Palermo. Alfonse engaged a trusty boatman who would be waiting for them at the foot of the steps leading down to the wharf, and who would in a short time row them out to the steamer.

The night which had been agreed upon for the execution of this attempt to escape, approached with overwhelming slowness. Alfonse tried to watch the play at the Casino with an air of indifference, and was only waiting for the moment when, as usual, the prince and his red-haired beauty should be fully absorbed in the

vagaries of the game. The luggage had been carried into the boat in the twilight already, and no one seemed to have noticed anything strange in the transaction, as the same man had often carried Alfonse out to the open sea, and he had been made aware, besides, of the intention of the two lovers.

Midnight drew near, and the prince was as yet merely trifling; he had not yet begun to play heavily. He was sipping his iced coffee, joking with the ladies about their richly-carved sunshade handles, and told stories which made the fair English woman laugh till she showed the whole two ranges of superb but gigantic teeth. Once Alfonse became afraid that the prince was watching him and looked suspicious. His eyes, he thought he saw, were incessantly following all his movements, and this led him to make quite sure to join him and his company near a window, and to sit so as to face him directly.

He sent for his favorite wine, sparkling Asti, but the moment he touched the brim of the glass he fancied he saw a terrible, distorted face look into the room through a window. This terrified him so that he had to set down the glass, and he felt how he turned pale. The face, which had instantly disappeared again, resembled, he thought strikingly, the Turkish Interpreter of fatal memory.

He sprang up and looked out of the window. He saw nothing. The English woman, who had followed his movements, asked him:

“What is the matter? You look like a ghost!”

Alfonse made some trifling reply and resumed his place, very much ashamed of his timidity. “My conscience,” he said to himself, “plays me ugly tricks. I am as easily frightened as a girl.”

“Won’t you tell us what it was?” asked another lady.

“Has any one of you perhaps noticed a guest here who hails from Africa? It looked to me as if I saw a

gentleman from Zanzibar, who belonged to the Embassy of the Sultan, that came last year to Berlin !”

“If such a darkling gentleman were among us we should have noticed him, I am sure,” said the prince

“Of course, we would all have noticed him,” added Alfonse. He drank his Asti, tried to shake off the uncomfortable feeling, and thought of the details of his project.

“It is strange,” said the prince, “how far we are dependent on habit in every respect. Why does a black image appear to us formidable, when we have never met with brown or black images of God? One would imagine black to be the original, the natural color of man, and white has only come to us gradually, as some members of our race, evidently intended for the Tropics, made their way northward and southward, where they learnt to wear clothes, to eat meat, and to become sick and pale. Such, at least, is the doctrine of our great Schopenhauer !”

“Oh !” exclaimed the young English woman, “now I can explain to myself what Stanley wrote. After he had found Livingstone, and when he was on his way home, crossing the whole Continent, he had been for many months exclusively among black men. When he reached the Portuguese colonies, he says he was perfectly horrified by seeing these Europeans ; for although we should have called them dark brown, they looked to him ghastly pale, and he adds that now he understood the terror of black men when they for the first time saw Europeans with their spectral, pale faces.”

“You see there,” said the prince, “the usefulness of erudition. The learned man explains everything.” And thereupon he expanded the subject, and overwhelmed his hearers with such a deluge of words that Alfonse was

more and more confirmed in his suspicions that the prince was watching him.

This became all the more serious to him as midnight, the hour appointed for their flight, was nearly approaching. He thought of the boat that was waiting, and of Chessa, whose heart was beating to see him come. And yet, he did not dare leave the room. What could he do if the prince should follow him?

At last, however, the idle talk came to an end, the ladies took their seats at their favorite table, spreading their bananas on the green cloth, with their bank notes, and the prince stood behind the chair of the red-haired girl.

Now Alfonse disappeared in the crowd. The night was bright, the moon's silvery light illumined the whole scene, but a flock of fleecy clouds drifted now and then over it, and for a time darkened the landscape. As on his first evening in Monaco, but with very different thoughts, Alfonse slipped hurriedly through the shrubbery of the park, after having concealed himself at the hotel in his large traveling cloak. With a pleasant sense of security, he felt the handle of his revolver, and cast away the last little feeling of fear arising from the face at the window. Only a little while longer, only a short walk through the little gorge and out on the coast, and he would float with his beloved one towards a blissful future.

The villa was dark ; in the verandah alone a pale pink lamp was shedding a faint, rosy light to show him the way to Chessa's chamber. He vaulted over the railing, crossed the verandah and opened the door which his love had left open for him. He found her busy with a tiny toilet bag, a masterpiece of English skill, and containing everything that a lady can possibly want on her travels. From a carefully concealed small drawer that was

full of rubies and diamonds, she drew the ominous necklace, and holding the mysterious old ornament in her hand, she said to Alfonse :

“I do not know whether it is foolish superstition, but I feel as if my fate depended on this talisman of coral and gold. I have never worn the chain since we left Berlin, but I think I will put it on to-day.”

She hung the remarkable ornament around her neck, and it looked magnificent, as the strange little forms and figures contrasted with her velvety, dark skin, and a deluge of blue-black hair rolled all over it. Alfonse, sunk in admiration, gazed at her, and said :

“Now you are entirely mine, you gypsy princess !” And caressing and kissing her, he added : “The boat is ready. Come !”

The servants had all been sent to bed, and no one met the couple as they left the villa, made their way through the gardens, and at last reached the wide, open sea in the silvery sheen of the moon. She hung on his arm and pressed it tenderly. The dark outlines of the boat were rocking under shelter of a colossal rock.

“What an enchanting night for an elopement !” said Alfonse, triumphantly, a proud feeling of delight filling his heart, as he pressed a kiss upon Chessa’s lips. “There where you see that dark spot lies our vessel. Come, let us get into the boat before the clouds hide once more our heavenly light.”

The boatman came to meet the two travelers, and helped first the lady to get into his small boat, carrying her a few yards through the playful, splashing waves, which came to break against the shingle in silvery showers. In the meantime, however, the moon had disappeared behind its fleecy veil of cloudlets, and all the objects around appeared phantom-like in their uncertain and deceitful outlines. Alfonse was looking at the boat,

in which he saw a crouching shape near the rudder, while Chessa was taking her seat on the foremost bench. Suddenly it appeared to him as if this figure of a man was much larger than the boy who had usually accompanied the boatman on his excursions.

“Who is that?” he asked the latter, pointing with his finger at the indistinct form near the stern.

“That is my boy, your Excellency,” said the man, getting ready to carry Alfonse also through the water.

“Wait a moment !” said Alfonse.

A thought of treachery crossed his mind ; he knew not why and whence, but the sight of this man inspired him unconsciously with suspicion. He hesitated. “We can manage the boat alone,” he said at last. “You can leave the boy here, Pietro.”

“Alone? Impossible, your Excellency !” cried the boatman. “Consider, I pray, that there is a lady in the boat, and your Excellency knows how different that is. Oh, if we were only we too, I do not say, but—”

The coast looked lonely, the sea deep and still, the boatman, an avaricious Italian who knew the purpose of the excursion and the importance of secrecy, the small but precious baggage, the large amount of money in Alfonse’s pockets, the unsafe boat and the dark night—all these circumstances were by no means calculated to calm the fears of the traveler.

“Why don’t you come?” asked Chessa, in a low, anxious voice.

Alfonse put once more his hand on the pistol in his belt, reflected that the revolver gave him control over six lives in case of need, and recalled his experience in the French war, where he had found that weapon a most useful, most trustworthy friend. He reflected how unwise it would be now to return, and still more to quarrel with the boatman.

“Well, then, forward march!” he cried in a spirit of bravado; had himself carried into the boat, and took his seat on the bench. As soon as the boat was quiet again, the man at the stern pushed off from the shore, the old man unfurled the sail, since there was a light breeze blowing in the right direction, and Alfonse, with his arm around the artist’s waist, felt as if all danger was overcome. It was not yet light enough to distinguish the features of the so-called boy, who besides managed to busy himself in such a way that his face was turned away from Alfonse.

The coast receded farther and farther, swiftly, and with a merry, purling, gurgling sound, the keel of the boat cut through the dark waters, and all of a sudden the Spanish singer raised her voice and in rollicking, frolicking tones she sang a joyous Spanish sailor’s song. Alfonse was enchanted, and listening to the silvery, bell-like notes, he was too busy watching the fairy-like beauty of the singer to notice the half-concealed features of the man he suspected, and thus they sailed out into the open sea.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WEDDING TRIP.

Count Eyry met on his journey to the Russian general’s encampment, with more and with greater difficulties than he had expected. He applied in Orenburg to several persons in high places, but came to the conclusion that the powers that ruled there did not just now wish to have foreign officers witnesses of what was going on.

Several friends also, who wrote to him from the vanguard and one or two detached corps, warned him not to hope for a more liberal policy. The count's desire to penetrate into the heart of Persia, to push his way, in fact, to regions which had never yet been explored by Western traveler, gradually grew weaker, and he became discouraged and disheartened.

The letters which the Countess Hyacinth sent him to Orenburg, and in a friendly tone kept him informed of what was going on in the circles with which he was specially bound up, were in these days a source of great comfort to him, and grew in attractiveness and in importance in proportion as his adventurous mind became calmer and more content. No wonder, therefore, that when after long, tedious waiting, official information was sent to him that the new expedition would not start before eight months, he instantly ordered his servant to pack his things, and started on his return to Berlin.

Hyacinth's violet eyes lighted up to a new life, and her cheeks blushed in maidenly reserve, when the stately, chivalrous form once more stood before her, trying to read his welcome in her face. The father also appeared less stern than he had been months ago. The painful impression produced by an event which, however sad, still had released the family from a heavy burden on their consciences, had faded away, and the future appeared to encourage new hopes.

Count Victor had a serious interview with the father of his adored, and the result was that he entered the young lady's boudoir, where she was busily employed in her embroidery, with an air of joy and happiness that she could not but read at once. And when he now repeated his prayer, and she heard once more the momentous words, both lovers felt as if this was no new love, but merely the happy conclusion of a long settled arrange-

ment. But what joy! A soft glow seemed to pervade her whole being, and left not the smallest fragment of fear or anxiety, of doubt or hesitation behind. Both felt perfect confidence in the heavenly dispensation, both felt as certain of their happiness as man can be while he dwells on earth.

“A poor knight and a poor damsel join their fortunes,” he said smiling, and then with a happy smile on his dark, burnt face, he went on painting the modest ways which would hereafter have to be theirs. “I see prophetically, my Hyacinth pore over her account books, wander through kitchen and cellar, calculate and bargain, and watch over the prodigality of a single cook or a single maid. I see you radiant, like the young morning, in your modest morning-gown, that is more becoming to you than Worth’s last confection, prepare my simple breakfast before I mount my horse; and I see you, but slightly changed, still simple and still adorned by inborn elegance, come to meet me when I return, tired and weary, from my hard service. Oh, what heavenly happiness! Splendid dinners and gorgeous feasts we shall not be able to give, but we shall be happy for all that, my Hyacinth, my love!”

With such speeches, half in earnest, half in jest, the countess and her betrothed passed many a joyous hour, and hastened, as far as it could be done, the day appointed for the wedding.

It was a most select company that met on this joyful day in the count’s house, and Hyacinth, in her bridal veil of old lace and the unfailing wreath of blooming myrtle, looked surpassingly beautiful—such was the unanimous decision of all who witnessed the ceremony. That very evening the newly-married couple started for Monaco, as Prince Lignac had urgently begged them to spend the honeymoon, during the late autumn, in that paradisaical corner of the earth.

They traveled slowly, remaining a few days in Frankfort, a few weeks in Paris, and leisurely enjoyed visits here and there along the road, like truly happy people who cared but for the moment. In Paris they were overtaken by a piece of news which was as pleasant as it was surprising. Old Baron Liondell had died, and in his last will was found a legacy of half a million for the count's family, subject only to the condition that a suitable white marble monument should be erected in their ancestral castle. By this inheritance the family was at once relieved of all financial difficulties, and were restored to their former pleasant and unencumbered position among the great families of the realm.

With hearts filled with gratitude to the old gentleman who had suffered so grievously, and shown himself so generous to the family, they continued their journey, and were received in Monaco at the station already by Prince Lignac. He told them at once that he and Chessa had been left the whole of the old banker's enormous wealth, as he had heard by telegram only forty-eight hours ago, and that they now were rich to an extent which could hardly be accurately defined. The newly-married couple offered their congratulations, and at the same time the expressions of their sympathy with the loss of his wife's uncle, and then enjoyed the enchanting views, which their drive to the villa afforded them, over the tropical vegetation of the gardens, and over the deep blue Mediterranean. A superb dinner awaited them.

"But where is your wife?" asked the count.

"My wife is traveling, dear Victor," replied the prince.

"Alone?" asked count and countess, amazed.

"Hardly!" was the prompt and cutting reply. "She seems to have left Monaco in company with her young

cousin, the ex-Lieutenant Steelyard, whose acquaintance she had renewed here, and I believe by water."

"What do you say?" cried the count, while his wife stared amazed at the perfectly unmoved face of the prince, whose wide-open blue eyes looked as calm as if he had been speaking of utterly unknown personages.

"I say that my wife left me late in the evening, three days ago, without observing the common courtesy of telling me that she was going away, and that I strongly suspect her of having been accompanied by her cousin, with whom she had kept up a great intimacy for some time."

"And you take it so coolly?"

"What could it help me to be furious?"

"You might at least, pursue her, put all the telegraph lines in motion, and get her to come back to you; you might kill the seducer and set an example how such creatures ought to be treated. I do not understand you!"

"My dear Victor, I thought of all that," said the prince, "but my second, sober thought made me think better of it. You say matrimony is holy. I agree, but I say reason also has its holiness. Let us reason. If my wife leaves me, does not that show that she likes to live somewhere else better than with me? If she travels in company of her cousin, I conclude that she likes his company better than mine. What am I to do? I can be sorry that she has no better taste, but I can certainly not improve her taste by keeping her forcibly near me. Love is a very peculiar thing. It cannot be forced. I consider myself a fair sample of a man not worse and not better than the average of men. But if it turns out that Chessa has no liking for me, shall I make myself utterly hateful to her by forcing her to keep me com-

pany? There is in Paris a friend of mine, an amiable, charming young man, Count Lestorg, who made the same unpleasant experience, that his wife ran away with a young Englishman, an attaché to the British Embassy. He did what you think I ought to do, he ran after them, fought a duel with the Englishman, broke his ear to pieces, and brought his wife back home. He has her now, but he has whispered more than once in my ear, that he wishes he had let her go. 'My wife thinks all the time of the Englishman with the broken ear, and weeps in my presence.' No! my dear Victor! At my wedding I resolved to do all I could to make my wife happy; for that is, I am convinced, the true meaning of the oath we take at the altar. This vow I mean to keep. Mr. Steelyard is not so bad, and if my wife really feels happy in his company, then I shall not interfere."

"I only fear, my dear Lignac," said the count, "that society will not comprehend such very unusual views, and will think your honor requires more energetic action."

"My dear Victor," said the prince, "no one can value public opinion more highly than I do. But I think there are limits to its weight also, and these every man must settle with his own conscience. However, I have anticipated such views as yours, also, and two of my friends have my strict order to challenge Mr. Steelyard wherever they may meet him. And I myself shall do him that honor, for my wife's sake only, if he should ever be stupid enough to cross my path."

"And has that—accident—not made the place unpleasant to you? Had you not rather leave Monaco? I hope our coming—"

"Oh, pray, do not think of it. Your charming visit here is in every respect a great favor, which I highly appreciate. I have never thought of leaving, and shall

not think of it as long as the weather is so glorious. Mrs. Grundy cannot be avoided in any society on earth, in Berlin or in Rome, in London or in St. Petersburg. The less ado I make of it the sooner it will be forgotten. This is my reason for quietly remaining here."

The two friends discussed the question for some time yet, while Hyacinth listened with bated breath, till at last the prince led the conversation in another channel so that she could take part in the discussion, and when dinner was over he proposed a walk to the palace.

The landscape beauties of the place made a deep impression upon the young wife, who had never yet been so far South, and greatly enjoyed the bland, soft air, and the blue sky above the deep blue Mediterranean, while at home October had already brought fogs and cold and even snow. Both men enjoyed her pleasure, but Count Victor was enthusiastic in his admiration of her keen perception and judicious appreciation of Nature's surpassing beauties.

The palace of the Prince of Monaco is not like so many Italian *palazza*, a modest villa with a pretentious title, nor an old ruin, but a genuine palace, which suffers only one drawback, that it is so utterly out of proportion with the diminutive size of the principality. Nature has lavished her richest treasures here, and Art has, for many generations, contributed its share of the work with matchless skill and unparalleled good taste.

When the three friends entered the gardens which surround the palace and everywhere look as if they formed a part of the whole by sending their gorgeous flower-beds right into the little courts and many openings between buildings, they met some ladies and gentlemen of the court who knew Prince Lignac. The two groups joined at once, and the young married couple found many an opportunity to confidential exchange of views and

impressions, by escaping the crowd occasionally unnoticed. From one of the inner gardens they stepped forth through a narrow gate half hid between two towering palm-trees, and down a few dismembered marble steps, upon an open place which afforded the most superb outlook over the sea. This had evidently been an observation post of the old fortress, where some guns had been stationed. The outer wall had had loop-holes in the embrasure, which were now completely concealed by geraniums and creeping plants. Beyond it the rock fell sheer down to the waters that tossed their foaming waves high up, capped with silvery crests.

Hyacinth was leaning on the count's shoulder, and her eyes filled with tears as she gazed out upon the sea, which just then was glowing like liquid, molten gold under the rays of the setting sun, while far, far away, the island of Corsica was faintly hanging on the horizon like a tiny cloudlet.

"This is too beautiful, my beloved!" she said, folding her hands. "I cannot yet realize my happiness in being here in this Paradise on earth, and united to you. I feel as if we must fly up to Heaven hand in hand."

The count kissed her forehead, and in his eye also there glittered something like a tear of joy.

"Do you know what I cannot understand?" she asked after a long pause.

"Well, what, my heart's darling?"

"I cannot comprehend your friend, Victor. If you were torn from me, that would be death to me. And before I could leave you, I think the world would have to perish first. And he, the prince, talks of it, laughs at it, and laughs at us."

"My sweet Hyacinth, that is very simple. We love each other. But Meridac and Chessa never did love

each other. I am disposed to think he is glad she ran away."

"The prince has become an enigma to me; he is uncanny," said the young wife, shuddering. "He may be as amiable as man can be, and this land may be as enchanting as you say, but I would rather leave here pretty soon, Victor."

There was to be a concert that night and "*The Dansant*" after it at the Casino, and the prince had ordered carriages to return from the Casino to his villa in Monte Carlo. They took the outer road, which follows the coast for awhile and then turns inland again near the other end of the town. The sun was sinking below the horizon, and seemed for awhile to set the water aglow from underneath; the small coasting vessels were lying like wierd, dark monsters upon this fiery mass, and the waves beat the rocks here with a low, hollow growl, while a cooling east wind was driving moist waves of air inland.

"Wonderfully fair and enchanting!" exclaimed Hyacinth, and drew in with full strength the refreshing sea-air, when she suddenly became aware of a dark crowd of men who seemed to gaze at something unusual. Loud cries were heard and hurried steps.

"What can it be?" asked the count.

As they drew nearer, they heard how the boatmen called out to each other, as they ran down to the water's edge, that a misfortune had happened, a terrible accident. A shadow flew across the prince's features, when he heard the outcry, as if anticipating a horror that might concern him.

He stopped the carriage and got out, requesting the count to go on with his bride.

The carriage drove on, but the prince went down to that part of the harbor where the men were assembled. Here a number of sailors and boatmen were busy trying

to draw, with long poles having hooks at the end, something out of the water and on shore. It looked like a many-colored bulk, but when they were able to lay it on the sand, it turned out to be two human bodies so closely clinging to each other that they formed, as it were, but one bulk. It was a man and a woman. The woman held with spasmodic fingers to the bloody clothes of the man.

As they lay on the shingle after they had been torn from each other, the prince recognized the features of his wife and her seducer.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE QUARREL.

Good, warm-hearted Ephraim, although no longer winged by his first glowing union with Flora, could not free himself from the bewitching charm of the love she inspired and the love he returned. It was too gloriously sweet to follow the golden-haired maid without ceremony, and to let his weary head rest a little in her embraces. Even the old house inspirited him. The low but deep rooms, with the old, unmeaning furniture, knew nothing of the world and its troubles, and in the bay-window with the flowers, time was three hundred years older than in Berlin. No philosopher, ancient or modern, pessimist or optimist, had ever criticised this community of two-legged birds without feathers, and here kissing was permitted without special license. Ephraim let himself be borne on and on by the vague, dreamy waves, like a swimmer on the bank of the swift-flowing river that

carries him, unconscious as he is, far out and away from the last possible chance of return.

News from home had generally but little interest for him, and the tragic end of Uncle Comet produced no other demonstration than a vigorous wagging of the head. He was deep in his heart fully convinced that a benevolent God was directing all events, and that it was foolish to meditate on the advantages or disadvantages of events which must come. But it made him sad to hear that his brother Alfonse had left the army and had finally disappeared, no one knew how. He wrote to his father: "Deal gently with the young man, even with Absalom!"

Fair Flora let him have his own way in sweetest simplicity—and he took it. He tried to persuade her often that their relations ought to be free from all Pharisaical cants, but as he did not very clearly know what he meant by that himself, he did not greatly wonder that she would continue to ask for information which embarrassed him greatly.

One soft, sweet evening towards the end of September, the young people, fair Flora and her Ephraim, the future forester with his beloved, and the friend who loved the elder cousin, had paid a visit to the forester's lodge, and when preparing to return, a proposition was made that they all should return by Castle Lenau, where the young princess' marriage with Count Fest was taking place that day. The plan was hailed with shouts of approbation, and soon the whole merry little troop was frolicking through the dense forest in the direction of the castle. On the way something like an attack of melancholy befell Ephraim, which he could not explain and little Flora could not dispel. All kinds of gruesome thoughts suddenly beset him, while he was racing with Flora or laughing with others. It seemed to become strangely clear to him this evening, that in the families

with whom he lived, a firm conviction prevailed that daughters should prefer marriage to elective affinities, and that marriage was after all their real and true destiny. And although he was firmly resolved never to marry dear little Flora, he yet could not think of parting with her—the result being that he felt himself irrevocably drifting towards an engagement.

He walked silently on under the clear, starry sky, and fair Flora hung, merrily chatting, on his arm. It was one of her charms which he valued above many others, that she did not object to his silence, much less thought there was any offence in it, but kept on prattling just as sweetly as if she received prompt and precise answers to every remark—her only effort being a kiss or two with which she from time to time tried to unlock his lips. This she had done just now, as she found him deeply absorbed in the study of a sunflower. He looked up at her with dreamy eyes, and said:

“The Ancients thought Geometry was the one and greatest amusement of the Gods—what do you think of that?”

Fair Flora laughed and shook her beautiful curls, while he looked up at the starry sky and thought of the Geometry of the Heavens. Thus they had gone some distance along the edge of the woods, when suddenly the road turned round a corner, and a view opened with surprising abruptness upon the palace with its long rows of brilliantly illumined windows, that vied with the countless lights and lamps which made even the depth of the forest a scene as bright as daylight. All the avenues and open spaces of the park displayed hundreds of Chinese lamps, and in the centre of this ocean of light the gay music of a large regimental band of musicians made itself heard. On the side terrace most remote from the centre of the company, they saw a score of dark-complexioned

men in ill-chosen costumes, with red sashes and glittering metallic ornaments, who were playing a curious kind of music specially for the lovers of Hungarian dances, which they merrily performed on the green turf, accompanying it with quaint snatches of song. It was a band of gypsies which had been sent for to gratify the bride of the day, and the passionate national songs of the vast plains of Hungary, now sinking into deep melancholy and then again rising to very jubilees of joy and rapture, strangely contrasted with the more simple and solid music of the Germans.

The forester, who had taken the lead of the little company, led them to this slightly remote place, but a princely servant, having recognized the well-known official, opened him a small gate in the invisible wire-fence, and invited them to a table not far from the princely kitchen. Here they took seats, and with surprising alacrity other servants brought food and drink to the little company. This turn of affairs was welcomed by all, and Ephraim also was nothing loath to taste the wedding-wine, as the attractions of the brilliant scene encouraged him to enjoy himself. Fair Flora also was radiant with delight, and enjoyed the unusual spectacle to her heart's content.

It was for her, who had never seen a specimen even of life in higher circles than her own, a great enjoyment to watch the festive arrangements and the eminent wedding-guests, the elegant ladies in their wonderful dresses, the handsome officers in brilliant uniforms, surrounded by the exceptionally rich and beautiful architecture of the palace ; and all this under a bright, cloudless sky with its millions of sparkling golden stars on their own dark blue background. Flora here caught a glimpse of another world, a world rich in joys and enjoyments, a world which she did not know, nor desire to live in, but which

evidently was wondrously fair, to judge by the mere glimpse which she obtained to-day.

Very different was the impression this world produced on Ephraim's mind. He looked up to the stars and fancied for a moment that he was sitting among the gods on high, with whom he now saw this funny little crowd on earth roll with amazing rapidity through the sky.

Ephraim's strange dreams were suddenly interrupted in an unexpected manner, for a slender officer in the almost poetic uniform of an Austrian hussar, came suddenly up to their table, looked haughtily, as if in search of some one, from face to face, and then, without ado, seized Flora's hand, put his arm around her waist, and disappeared with her in the crowd of dancing guests. Disgusting as the proceeding appeared to Ephraim, he was far more distressed by the unmistakable satisfaction with which Flora acquiesced in her fate. Instead of struggling with it, or at least of following the bold robber like a lamb on its way to the shambles, Flora went with him willingly, and showed in her face such genuine happiness, in her eyes such pure joy, that Ephraim's heart sank low.

The handsome officer brought Flora back after awhile, and addressed her some compliments which Ephraim could not understand, but which Flora seemed to appreciate, as she probably would have done had they been uttered in Chinese or Japanese. At all events she thanked him with her sweetest smile, and showed everybody around her a gentle kindness and perfumed courtesy that had not been natural to her before. Ephraim pretended not to notice the change in her manner, but quietly drank his wine and tried to keep his rebellious heart from boiling over.

"A wretched generation, a miserable race!" he said to himself. "We must purchase you or must tame you—

true love you do not know. It is not worth while to call you our own, and the true philosopher neither marries nor seduces. What is the triumph worth over a heart to which a gold-laced coat and a stiff black moustache will forever be a danger?"

Flora, however, amused herself royally, as she called it, and did not at all notice her lover's silence. She had never been as happy in her life. A servant told her that the Austrian officer was a count, and this had filled the measure of her happiness to the brim. The name she had not caught—but what did it matter? To have danced with a count, an officer, a hussar, moreover a strikingly handsome man, and above all a man who had promised he would come back and ask for another dance—was not that bliss enough? She repeated in her mind every word he had said, and wondered anew how very witty and bright it all had been, and how she had had to laugh all the time! He had not spoken of the Gods, or of Geometry; he had told her with a delightful Hungarian oath, that he had never, never in his life seen as pretty a girl as she was! He had been very bold, for in the very height of the dance, when they were all turning round and round, and she at least did not know where she was and what they all were doing, he had kissed her without asking her leave. Or what was it, if it was not a kiss? Something so wondrously sweet and good she would like to try it once more, just to know what it really was.

In the meantime Ephraim's dark looks and persistent silence had attracted the attention of the forester, who was a kind-hearted, good-natured man, and could not bear to see people unhappy whom he loved. Unfortunately his efforts to cheer up Ephraim failed lamentably, because he blended them with the praise he sang of the princely house. He evidently, in his old-fashioned loyalty

and reverence for high places, considered it an honor, if an officer, a guest invited by his master, the duke, came and danced with his daughter, and the candor with which he confessed this, made the young man almost mad. He rose suddenly, and proposed that they should return home. This proposal, however, met with vehement opposition. The forester's family and his friends were all most comfortable in their snug corner so near the great fountain from which all eatables and drinkables proceeded on their way to the ball-room and other parts of the festive place.

"What is the matter?" asked Flora. "Why do you want to go already?"

"Do you really not know?" he asked, with quivering lips.

"Really not!" she answered, and she told the truth.

"Then I'll tell you; I do not like your following any one who asks you to dance with him!"

He regretted having said it as soon as the words were spoken, for he knew very well that perfect composure would have been the best policy, but it was too late. Fair Flora did not have the gift to keep secret what she thought. She spoke freely and with the same wonderful candor with which she had confessed to him how dear he was to her; she now told him that he had no right to make her any reproaches, to deprive her of any pleasure, or to forbid her doing anything she chose to do.

"There the girl is right!" said the forester seriously, looking at Ephraim. He had for some time disliked intensely the uncertain relations that existed between the young man and fair Flora.

Ephraim was silent. He felt that they were right, these people with whom he had so little in common, whose words and thoughts were as strange to him as his were to them. He made no effort to explain his feelings.

But in Flora's eyes a tear had, in the meantime, come to show how deeply she felt offended by this strange man who claimed to control her actions. She had other things, besides, that had long clamored for utterance, and now came out, she hardly knew how.

"Yes," she said in a very decided tone, "yes, Ephraim, you behave very badly to me! You say I am a coquette, and like everybody who comes and courts me. If you had any ground for saying so, it could only be because I have granted to your courting perhaps more than was right, while you have done nothing for me in return. You do not know how much I have suffered for you, from parents, relations and friends. They all tell me it is not right in me to be so intimate with you, whilst you do nothing to show that you like me. If you were concerned for my reputation, they say, you would have long since taken the proper steps. I know you are a scholar, a great scholar, but even a scholar ought to know that a girl is not to be treated in such a disgraceful way. The few years I may look nice will soon be gone, and then I'll sit there and no one will care for me any more! I have, of course, never said a word about that, because I do not think a girl ought to speak of such things, but since you now assume a tone as if you had a right to command me, I must tell you I am free to dance with whom I choose; and when so great a lord comes and asks me, it would be ill-mannered in me to refuse him. What would my uncle and my cousins have thought of me if I had refused to dance with him? Ask them."

Fair Flora would have said much more if at that moment the beautiful hussar had not approached, with a victorious smile, to ask her for another dance. She promptly wiped away the little moisture in the corner of her eye and turned to him with a smile on her face. But this time Ephraim, in his bitterness, stepped between the

two. He felt that all was over between him and Flora, but he would not permit this bold aristocrat to take her, as it were, out of his arms. In his innermost heart he was chivalrous enough. Already in his early youth he had dreamt much of heroes and heroic deeds. If he had but been of the strength and the invulnerability of Siegfried, he also would have fought with giants! But here was no giant, here he could be the brave Paladin without making himself ridiculous.

"Sir," he said in a haughty tone, "you will have the kindness to wait. I have something to say to this lady."

"I should think," replied the Austrian, looking down upon Ephraim from the height of his rank and his uniform, "the young lady would know best herself whether she wishes to dance with me or to talk to you."

"Certainly," added little Flora, "I am free to do what I choose. We can talk after I have danced."

The officer laughed contemptuously. "That was cleverly said. Go, my friend, and take a glass of beer; that will calm you."

To Ephraim in his excited condition, this little scene, that to everybody else might have appeared utterly insignificant, was a furious tempest which roused all his nerves to a state of rage. The conduct of this faithless maiden appeared to him so monstrous, the position in which she had placed him with this strange, haughty man, so humiliating, that he lost all self-control. Too delicately organized for the ordinary contact with daily life, and virtually communing only with ideal beings, he felt the pressure of real life like the torture of a cruel instrument.

Still, a moment longer he abstained from violence, and in a touchingly painful voice he said: "Oh, Flora, dear, do not disgrace me before this man—I can settle with him easily enough." For an instant Flora had a sense of

repentance, and she hesitated. But her great enjoyment at the side of this skilful dancer came back to her memory, and the world conquered: "Just you go! What disgrace is there here? You are all wrong to-day!"

"Come, my fair child, come!" urged the young officer impatiently, for the conversation lasted too long for him; "that seems to be an impudent Jew boy!"

Ephraim drew back and breathed deeply. A blow would not have hit him harder than this word. But his noble nature rose under this excess of suffering and filled it with manly dignity. Icy calmness instantly mastered his nerves, and his pale face suddenly hardened into the repose of resoluteness.

While Flora hurried away, happy in the protection of the handsome count, Ephraim went to look around for a friend in the crowd. He saw a man in uniform, and at once formed the resolution to entrust the matter to him. Nor was he disappointed. Although the officer was at first greatly surprised at Ephraim's request, he saw in his whole manner and speech that he was a gentleman, and the fire in his eyes as well as the calmness of his behavior, convinced him of the seriousness of the matter. He read his card with the well-known name, and at once made up his mind to befriend the poor, insulted young man, only he wished first to make an attempt at pacifying the two adversaries, and hoped to avoid a combat which only Ephraim's deep feeling and the favorable impression his earnestness had made, induced him to permit.

The officer begged Ephraim to remember that the Austrian officer was a Hungarian, and as such not quite master of the German language, and might, therefore, readily appear to have been insulting when no such intention existed. But Ephraim quietly insisted upon the challenge, and his new friend acquiesced.

The officer thereupon bowed, and at once went in search of his Austrian comrade, who was at that moment merrily drinking punch with his lively dancer, and more and more completely succumbed to her charms. He did not deny having used the offensive words, and declared, with a terrible curse, that he did not in the least repent having driven off the impudent fly from such an appetizing morsel. There was nothing left, consequently, but to agree to a meeting early the next morning, at a certain place half an hour from the palace, as soon as the authority of the Prussian officer had prevailed on the Austrian to admit the student as a fit adversary.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FAREWELL.

Fair Flora was rather distressed when Ephraim disappeared that evening, and neither she nor her company heard anything of him. Most of them thought he might have taken something amiss, and Flora even feared she might have offended him by her words. He was such a strange, eccentric man, who treated important matters as trifles, and made out of mole hills mountains.

The fact is, that the young man, rage in heart, had walked home through the forest, alone and quickly, pursuing his way almost instinctively in the dark night, and only aided by the light of the stars that now and then twinkled through the foliage of the trees. After having walked perhaps two hours in this way, the forest opened before him, and he came to a high place jutting out from

the mountain side like a terrace, and affording a beautiful outlook upon the Neckar valley and the city beyond. He paused and looked at the ghost-like landscape. Deep sighs followed each other. He could not guess what was going on within him. He knew what a splendid view was unrolled before him. He saw that this bright country with its faint, misty outlines of hill and mountain in the far distance, with the silver thread of the stream in the valley, with the charm of dim, quivering mists covering the lowlands, and black shadows of tall trees, possessed paradisaical beauties—which he could not feel! He saw that this clear sky with its calmly wandering stars and constellations might open immeasurable depths for strong eyes—but not for his!

He fell on his knees before the all-powerful charm of Nature, and the tears poured in streams from his eyes and relieved his heart. Then, however, he felt overcome by great exhaustion; he could not combat a weariness, a prostration, that seemed to conquer him in spite of all his efforts. He sat down on a mossy bank under a dark, densely-foliaged tree, and was soon asleep. He slept profoundly and steadily till the cold waked him. Then he opened his eyes, looked around in amazement, and at last knew where he was. He trembled and shivered with cold. His frail, delicate body was not made for such roughing.

“It would be strange luxury,” he said, sneering to himself, “if I should catch a bad cold on the day on which I am killed.”

He looked around, and remembering that he had once been here and had refreshed himself and some friends at a little country inn near by, he started in search of the house.

The young actress who lived in the same house with

Ephraim, was disturbed when he did not come home that evening. She had been studying the part of Adrienne Lecouveau till two o'clock in the morning, hoping he would come after all, and give her some hint or advice before retiring. But she heard Flora's company return—and no Ephraim.

When, however, the next morning brought no Ephraim to his disconsolate friend, she became seriously anxious, for such a thing as a whole night spent away from home had never yet happened, and at last, after the rehearsal, when she still found his room empty, she made up her mind to inquire in Flora's house.

The young girl played at first the indifferent neighbor, and was quite defiant. She thought it not unlikely that the charms of this actress might have taken Ephraim from her side, and from this moment, woman-like, she conceived a perfect hatred against her, and new love and new regard for Ephraim. Still, as she discussed the matter with the actress, she remembered some details which had escaped her yesterday—his interview with the Prussian officer, his seriousness, the meeting between this same officer and her Austrian count, all these circumstances appeared to-day in a very different light. In her distress, and tormented by her conscience, she spoke more freely of yesterday's occurrence than prudence would have advised, and the clever actress soon guessed the whole proceeding.

“I have long since expected this would come,” she said angrily. “A person such as you was the very person to make such a sensitive nature thoroughly unhappy. You have played the coquette and the flirt, and done all sorts of things with outlandish officers, till you have grieved the poor, innocent man to such an extent that he is going to fight a duel about you. Who knows where he now is, if he is still among the living at all !”

Flora answered these and similar reproaches with all the bitterness of jealousy, for she could very clearly see the great interest the actress took in her lover, and at the same time she tried to exculpate herself. With ironical smiles the other one continued :

“It is true that extremes meet. How else would it be explained that this good young man, who is as innocent as if he had but yesterday fallen from Heaven, should have fallen in love with you. He is noble-hearted, enthusiastic, of finest sensibility, exceedingly clever, learned, and of a goodness of heart which is very rare among men. What you are I need not tell you, except that you are exactly the opposite. You ought to be ashamed ! ‘Fragments of his mind would have made a god of you,’ says Schiller.”

“If you mean to be so ill-behaved,” cried Flora, “you had better go away. I did not ask you to come to me. You live opposite, but you are in love with him, and you have lured him away from me. Every decent man would have behaved differently with me than he has done. You are a hypocrite. You have always looked as if you were one of the Holy Innocents, but still waters are deep ! You live in the same house with him and you are always together, you two, and I see how you love him or you would not be so impudent.”

“If we are to engage in abuse, you will easily get the better of me—but I feel flattered, for those who are right never think of vilifying others. And you must know this gentleman, who is simple enough to let himself be led by the nose by you, very little, if you imagine he could ever have courted you and me at the same time. That I love him, I make no secret ; it is no disgrace to me that I have found out what a man he is, and how great is his value. I take it to be an honor for me that I love such a man as he is. But, unfortunately, he does not love me. Hence my

relations to him are the same as those in which I stand to my favorite poets. They are dead long since, but I love them notwithstanding. But of course you cannot understand that, and I won't take the trouble to try and explain it to you. I am not a hypocrite as you are—I do not hide my feelings under a pretty little decent mask. For I am an actress and actors are not hypocrites!"

Fair Flora had much to say in reply, but at that moment a light hunting-wagon drove up before the house opposite, and Ephraim himself, accompanied by the officer and another gentleman, a civilian, got out.

The actress left Flora without saying another word, and returned home. But Flora remained where she was, regretting that she had felt useless anxiety. Nevertheless she kept watching Ephraim's windows with great anxiety. The actress, more observant than her rival, had immediately been struck by the pallor on Ephraim's face, and went straight to him to inquire what she could do for him.

He told her without hesitation, but with a melancholy smile on his face, that he had fought a duel and seriously wounded his adversary. The girl, though delighted at his escape, was on the other hand terrified by the unnatural fire in his eyes, his paleness, and something feverish and very unusual in his whole being, which she had never seen before. Besides, she was deeply shocked by the tragic news itself, and the danger which the Austrian officer had evidently been threatening. Shuddering, and with folded hands, she sank upon a chair near the door, and listened, as if in a dream, to the conversation between Ephraim's companions, while he himself went to report the occurrence at once to the University authorities, and to surrender to the police.

"I never saw a man more calm and collected in my life," said the officer. "I have nothing to say against

Count Uhazy, he was as brave as a man can be, but I saw his eyelids quiver when he looked into the mouth of the pistol, and his hand was not quite as steady as it is when he fires at a target. But this slender Jew, who told me he had never even held a pistol in his hand, stood there—I can hardly tell you how! He looked as if the matter did not concern him in the least, as if he were there merely to give another man the pleasure to fire at him. A bright smile hovered on his face—something heavenly I should say, if it were not ridiculous to call it so!”

“I even thought he had the first time missed on purpose,” remarked the civilian, “and it was only when the count cursed, that something moved in him, and then I saw he took aim.”

“Very likely, very likely!” said the officer. “He is a very curious sort of a man, and I have a real respect for him, although generally I cannot avow any special liking for Abraham’s children.” The actress raised her head.

“He is not a Jew!” she said.

“Not a Jew? Why, then, did he take the Austrian’s ‘Jew-boy’ as a personal insult!”

“His parents are Christians and so is he; he has told me so again and again.”

“Very likely, but it is the blood. The baptismal water does not change the blood. That is a difficult question, Doctor, is it not? I have always been much interested in the question of hereditary qualities. What do you think of it?” And thereupon the two men plunged into a lively discussion on that subject, while the actress sat by thinking, and coming to the conclusion that this event would certainly rob her of her friend.

When Ephraim returned and told of the many investigations and inquiries that awaited him, she began seriously to fear the result of this over-excitement on his delicate, nervous system, and refined sensibilities. He

declared his intention to leave town the same day and to return to his parents ; and his companions left him after having promised to keep him well-informed of his adversary's condition. Only the actress remained with him, and with womanly tenderness, suppressing her own deep emotion, busied herself with all the little domestic arrangements that were necessary to make his leaving the same day possible.

Evening was approaching, and the carriage was at the door that was to take him to the station, when suddenly Flora rushed into his room.

She came with tearful eyes straight up to him, and besought him to forgive her. She had watched all day long at her window, and felt her conscience calling on her louder and louder to go and ask pardon. She had heard that a duel had been fought, and was perfectly amazed that her pale, timid lover, whom she had never thought capable of harming any one, should of a sudden turn out a hero ! It filled her with unbounded respect that he should have so nearly killed that handsome, bold hussar who was a count besides ! When she finally saw in his brilliantly-lighted rooms how the preparations for his journey were nearly completed, she could resist no longer and ran across.

“It is my fault that this horrible affair has come to pass ! Woe is me, poor and unfortunate child ! Oh, I am such a light, frivolous girl ! Oh, Ephraim, I have always loved you so dearly ! I love you still most dearly—I do not care in the least for that Austrian officer—must I be punished now and so severely ? Shall we really never see you again ? Oh ! poor me ! Oh ! forgive me and remain here. I will never, never give you cause for displeasure again !”

Thus, accusing herself and supplicating forgiveness, the beautiful girl tried everything to win back her

aggrieved lover. But alas! Her power was gone! Her love had lost its charm! Another power had gotten hold of him, and there was an end to her dominion over him!

He saw the lovely eyes, whose blue splendor had once intoxicated him, now shed tears without the slightest emotion; he no longer felt the electric power of the golden hair, and the soft, blooming skin. He looked back upon his life in the Neckar valley as upon a dream; deep sadness seized him, and when he had taken a quiet, friendly farewell of both the girls, he told himself that one great and important period of his life had gone by, and he was standing at the portal of another.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE HAVEN.

Ephraim returned, a weary wanderer, to his parents' home. His face was pale, his blood ran fiercely through his veins, and his dark eyes had a sickly sheen, as he embraced father and mother after the long separation. The sight filled their hearts, which were already heavy with grief on account of the disappearance of their first-born, with new care and anxiety. He told his father, in lonely hours of communion, all the events of his life in Heidelberg, concealing nothing; and when the wise old gentleman looked at him with grief and sorrow in his furrowed face, he said to him: "To love and to be wise both, is not granted even to the gods!" On the second day after his return he refused to rise from his couch. He had no strength left; complete prostration paralyzed his limbs, and his eyes shone with a light which did not

seem to draw its food from earthly sources. But a touching submission could be read in all his features, and when the physician, summoned by his anxious parents, looked with deep concern at his patient, Ephraim smiled at him, and told him there was but one physician who perhaps could really help him, and his name was Death. He felt that the unfortunate night after that terrible excitement, with its cold wind and heavy dew, had done the harm, giving his delicate constitution a blow from which there was no recovery. Thus the parents had each their own great grief, which, with touching unselfishness, each tried to conceal from the other. The mother, more interested in her handsome, first-born son, Alfonse, whose mysterious disappearance had only added to the prestige which he had always enjoyed, spoke but rarely of him, while the father tried to reward her by keeping from her knowledge all the frequent and distressing symptoms in the other brother's case. The poor father saw in his son's condition now the fulfilment of his early auguries. For already in the child he had noticed that the mind was too active for the body, claiming and obtaining from the latter strength which was intended for the development of the body. In this conviction, he had tried to limit the boy's hours of study, and even more recently yet, he had admonished him, in fair Heidelberg, to devote more time to Nature and less to his books.

At the same time it was to the unfortunate father a strange, half-painful, half-delightful experience, to see how with every step which the disease took in its development, and the patient showed more weakness, Ephraim's mind became clearer, purer and happier.

With the solemn feeling of witnessing the creation of new feelings, as it were, the father saw a divine gentleness and contentedness speak in the pale features of the

sick man, as if the psyche, near its deliverance, was looking with joy to the Beyond. This cheerfulness never left him any more since the day when the welcome news reached him that his wounded adversary was out of danger and would shortly return to his garrison.

Another letter which reached the Steelyards' house about the same time, brought, on the other hand, the sad news of the manner in which Alfonse had ended. For days Mrs. Clara could not be prevailed upon to leave her bed, and her suffering son was not allowed to hear anything of the terrible calamity.

Ephraim's mental activity, strangely enough, kept pace with the calmness of his soul and the weakness of his body, so that he daily spent hours in scientific work or in serious conversation. If Doctor Steelyard did not wish seriously to afflict his son he had to enter upon grave discussions with him, and to his surprise found himself become more and more the pupil, and his son the master, receiving from him suggestions and explanations which led him to profound meditation. Thus they had one day been discussing questions of deepest meaning and greatest importance for mankind, when towards sunset the weakened young man sank back exhausted, resting his angelic head on the pillow. It so happened that the last golden rays of the setting sun fell upon his haggard but illumined features, and as they one by one withdrew from his face, and left it in pale shade, the father thought he saw the light literally take the life out of his countenance, till, seizing his parents' hands with a gentle pressure, he once more smiled upon them, and then passed away with a last slight sigh.

When the news of Ephraim's death reached the friendly circles of Heidelberg, the eyes of the actress and of fair Flora shed not, burning tears. But while the former preserved for life a painful memory of her idealistic

friend, Flora found comfort very quickly. It was but a few weeks later that she had already met with a student who reminded her so forcibly of the young man from Berlin that she thought it no robbery to devote to him the same love she had felt for Ephraim. He was a young Russian nobleman, who wielded the rapier with consummate skill, a tall, dark-haired youth, rather weary of the world and very profuse in his expenditures, who, however, knew how to appreciate fair Flora's charms, first at great sleigh-parties and afterwards under bowers of roses. But this love also lacked constancy. The Russian went to Berlin, and Flora began to look out for a more solid and permanent friend. Her magnificent hair and her radiant eyes are an ornament of every concert and every ball given for benevolent or other purposes, and no public entertainment is complete where Miss Flora does not appear. But the family begin to fear that this may be her fate ; but all more serious candidates for her favor begin to show a lamentably good memory of romantic Ephraim and the lavish Russian, and to think that her splendid golden hair and her far-famed blue eyes are too brilliant for domestic happiness.

The Baroness Blank never recovered from the blow she received at Punkinton in the minister's house. She would have welcomed death rather than undergo that humiliation. She who had before been full of passion and apparently endowed with unconquerable elasticity, became helpless in mind and body from the hour when her own child had turned from her. She became an old woman in a few weeks, her hair turned gray, and although she still possessed the secret of most elegant costumes, her former inimitable grace of motion was lost forever. The cruel egotist, to whom fate and her own guilt had chained her, and who in his narrow soul and

poor head never dreamt of anything but his own well-being, soon saw in the poor, broken-down woman an unbearable burden, and got rid of her without formality. Thus it was only the pity felt for her by distant relatives which saved her from actual starvation. A remote kinsman, who in his youth had loved her a few weeks, offered her an asylum on his estate in the country, and there it fell to the lot of her who had been worshiped by the great of the earth, to have to endure the whims of a young lady as whose "companion" she was tolerated in the house! Silent and yet restless, unknown to the world and not caring for the world, she creeps through the richly-furnished rooms, and regularly goes to church carrying the ether flacon, the aromatic spirits, or the chloral crystals of her nervous and haughty cousin; and like a shadow of her own self she spends the last years of her earthly existence.

Edward and Alma reached Naples safely, and found their prince greatly pleased with Edward's plans and drawings, and full of new projects, so that the architect foresaw at once ample employment for his talent. The two are happy, for they are made for each other, one in love, and, moreover, both independent of such things as are most apt to interfere with our happiness here below. The house in which they live, and the furniture, would, it is true, hardly content Sylvia, unless it be in a picture or judged from a romantic standpoint. The draperies at the windows are bright-colored creepers, grape vines and climbing roses, the carpets are the work of the peasants of the neighborhood, and the guests who walk over them are accustomed to do without the ceremonial of cold and foggy countries. But they are all people who only come because it gives them pleasure to come. When Edward, in the splendor of an Italian morning, sees the little angel on Alma's knees, the enchanting boy that looks so strik-

ingly like him, then he often fancies that Rafael's inspiration may come to him as he also paints the Madonna and the infant.

Sylvia is happy, in her way. She has married an elderly gentleman high up in the official hierarchy of the government, and hopes to be "Her Excellency" before she dies. Her salons are famous in Berlin, her society is the best, her dinners are known in every capital of Europe, and her great entertainments are honored by Royalty. She manages her fortune herself, and the bonds she buys are almost sure to rise soon. Children she has not. At times she casts a glance at her husband and asks herself how poets can write in such glowing terms of love. Her husband is sometimes in bad humor, and has a tendency to rheumatism and to choice wines; he drinks Ragatz water and studies the weather predictions. Sylvia does not always agree with him, but enjoys the satisfaction of being right in the end. On the whole she is happy. She understands the world and the world understands her.

Happy are also Count Victor and Hyacinth his beloved wife. When the handsome, proud couple appeared for the first time after their wedding at their ancestral castle, to be present at the inauguration of the monument of Amadeus, the spectators could well wish that the departed might not be able to see earthly things. The count is still in the army; he keeps the best horses that can be gotten, and regularly, at the annual meeting of the coaching club, he carries off the first prize.

Prince Lignac, on the other hand, is not happy. He often wonders why he is so melancholy, but cannot find the reason, and therefore is unable to mend matters. He made an exploration voyage to the North Pole, during which he was for six weeks driven about between ice fields in a boat which was too small to allow him ever to

stretch himself out at full length. When friends asked him if the suffering was not terrible, he would answer: "Yes, the boat was rather short, but what does that weary when compared with the fearful monotony of life in Paris?"

He maintains, when discussing the question with Count Victor, that he has too much money, because "that ruins men's tempers," he says. "There must be a limit to all things, and a fortune which corresponds with the wishes of the owner, is alone satisfactory. But as many millions as I got through my marriage with poor Chessa are a burden. I have not only the cares of managing so much money, but I must read every day the quotations on 'Change, and am constantly trying to find out some new way of enjoying my money."

"I should think that was easy enough. Give the money to benevolent institutions."

"Oh, yes," replied the prince, "only—I do not care. But I begin to discover that great wealth has a correlative power. It hardens the heart and has something of pitch about it, so that it grows daily harder to part with it."

The count does not think that his wealth is really the cause of the prince's melancholy. He said to his wife after his last visit: "Lignac wants to get married again—but he lacks the courage."

Hyacinth shakes her head, turns her still undimmed violet eyes to the cradle, in which her second little son is sleeping, and soon forgets the prince and the whole world.

The Turkish Interpreter is reported to have been seen in London. The Secretary of the Turkish Legation at least told Prince Lignac that he had accidentally met him at one of the Queen's Drawing Rooms, in the retinue of the Sultan of Zanzibar, where he appeared in the na-

tional costume, and with that rock of offence, the gold and coral necklace around his neck. The prince had some idea of hunting up the Arab, but soon after heard that he had returned to Zanzibar.

In the house of Doctor Steelyard there was great grief and deep mourning for some time. The parents could never entirely get over the loss of their two eldest sons. They try their best now in the education of the younger children to avoid everything that might be injurious to them as it had been to the others. Mrs. Clara cannot convince herself, however, that Ambition can be pernicious; she still hopes that the world will discover the great merit of her husband's works, and that her sons will fill high places. The poor old doctor, whose soul has been purified in seven fires, as he himself says, still pursues the search after truth, and employs, as efficient means, the last teachings of his son Ephraim. Often, when he has long been alone in his study, he fancies he is conversing with the child whose soul was too powerful for his body, and he rejoices in his faith in immortality. He embodies his thoughts in works, "content with few readers," saying: "Time will show them to be true."

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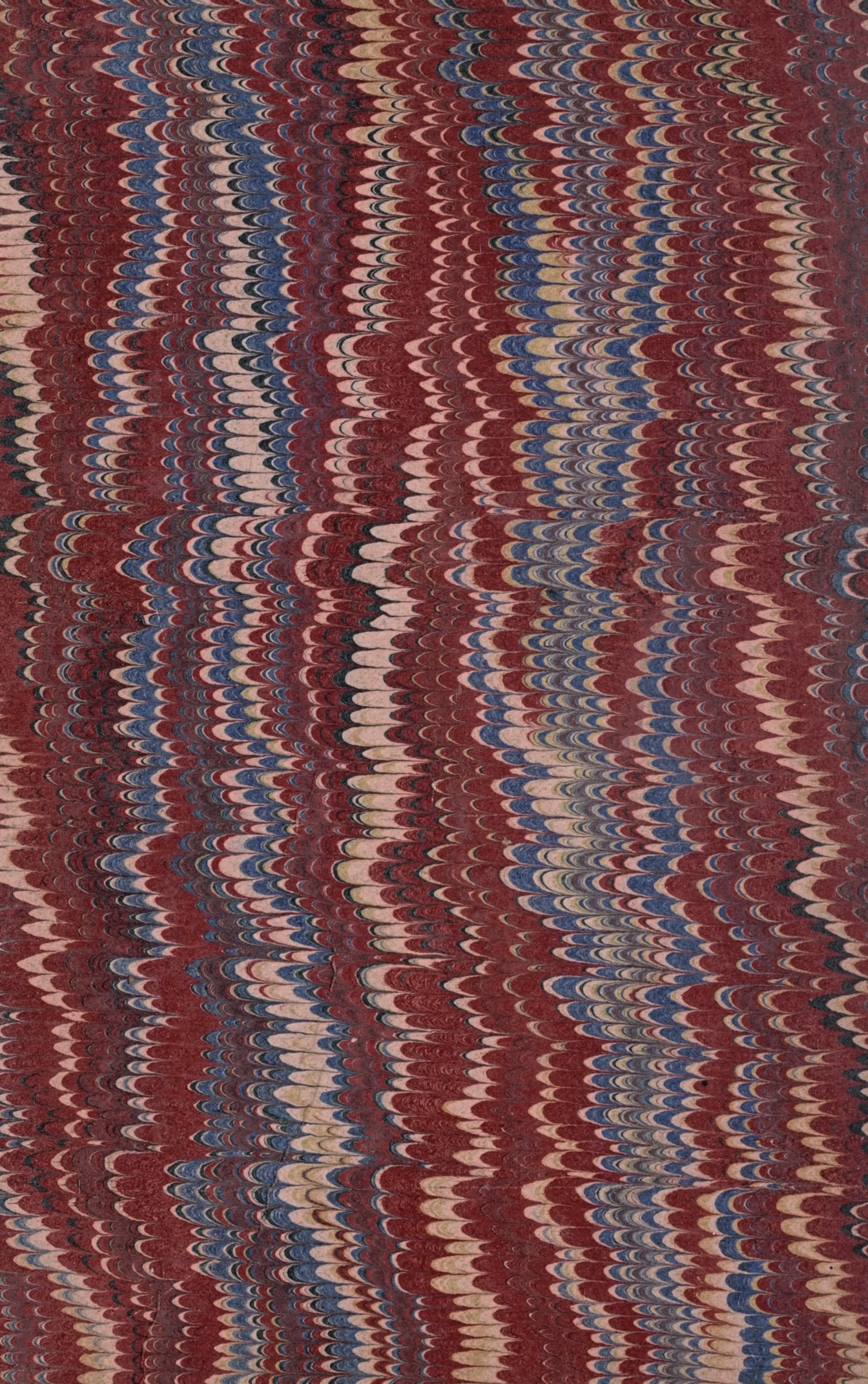
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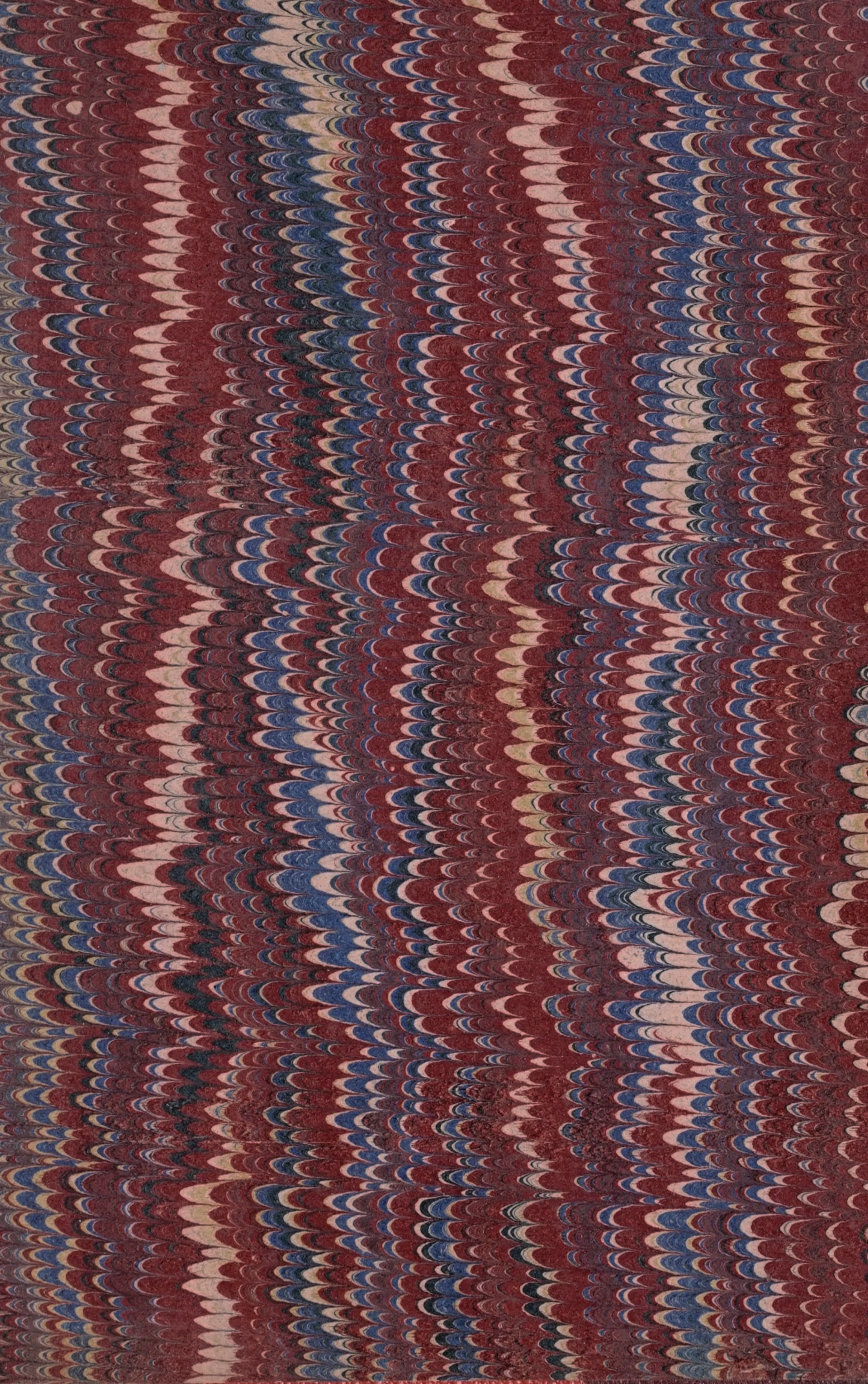
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"I HAVE FOUND IT MATCHLESS FOR
THE HANDS AND COMPLEXION"

Adelina Patti

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