THE PRIMA DONNA.

CHAPTER XV.—(CONTINUED.)

Thus I turned to my books and my easel again, in a spirit of dogged endurance, still blindly devoid of any new motive whatsoever; for "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" was to me a foolish question, with little meaning and no relevancy; only an outburst of Hebrew devotion: a poetic license in exalted humility of ancient composition. I should as quickly have asked: "What is Mina that I should be mindful of her?" And verily I think that I should have seen no possible difference betwixt us twain.

It is very easy, now, to see how egotistically I overvalued myself and how cruelly and blindly I undervalued Mina; but I loved her still, and though I would not go again to the opera or the hotel, when she had appealed to my honor and manliness to leave her, I did, night after night, walk down the Arno and lean upon the embankment wall, opposite the hotel, after the opera had closed, and look up at the great windows, which I easily discovered opened upon Mina's apartments, and a curious sensation of satisfaction crept over me, bringing happiness with the thought that I might thus, theoretically even, touch but the hem of her garment, and as the remaining nights grew fewer I realized painfully how much I should miss her when she was gone. I even thought at times of following her, to live at least in the atmosphere which she was breathing. I might have done so, possibly; I cannot tell; but one night she came to the window. In the soft light shining from within I could distinctly see her and, reassured by the fact that in the darkness below I was invisible, I looked up boldly and eagerly. She pushed open the swinging sash and, leaning upon the embellished casement, turned a little till her eyes wandered down the silvery Arno. I could not look into them but I could see the face most distinctly in the light, which seemed almost to emanate from the masses of loosened hair that fell like golden sunshine about her face.

Breathlessly I stood there, doubting if I were waking, fearing lest I might still be sleeping; sleeping in the little attic chamber on the Rhine: for there above me, looking down into the clear, blue water I saw—not the face of Mina as I had known it in Boppard and yet precisely the face of Mina that had followed me through all these years—the lovely face of the vision that came to me in my dream; the beautiful angel that beyond the phantom was beckoning me on to the Lorelei. The face that had promised me a life out of death, the victory out of defeat, a truimph some day somewhere, for Mina and for me, hidden deep in the heart of the Lorelei.

Again I stood shuddering before the prophet, whose hand had painted for me in my dream the beautiful face of Mina as I should see it twelve long years afterward. Again, with eyes, but not to read the riddle, with ears, but not to hear the voice, with a heart incapable of comprehending, I asked myself: "What is the message? What is the secret that it should impart?"

While I was wondering, and the gray stone walls of the hotel seeming in the darkness to be the ledge of rock and the Arno the blue water of the Rhine, there stole from the window one soft note and than another. I could hardly hear them, even in the stilly night, yet more distinctly than the clanging of an orchestra each sound reverberated about me. It was soft and low, and yet, if ever a voice were sweeter to mortal ear, if ever a song made gladder the heart of man, it must have emanated from beyond the limits of this world and have been sung by angels. This it was to me though it was the song that for twelve years I had hated as one could only hate a spectral raven never flitting from the bust above his door:

"Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten,
Das ich so trauring bin;"

I listened to the very end, and the end was the same little trill, as though we were away upon the bills of Boppard, and she who sang it was just my little Mina as of old. I am sure that I should have applauded, oblivious of all the intervening years and changes, had not Mina recalled me to myself by turning abruptly from the window, leaving me alone with my thoughts in the dark street, by the river wall, upon the Arno.

"Could she," I asked myself, "by any possibility have sung that song and not have thought of me?"

The grim Lorelei, towering above me, caught the first warm glow of sunrise. The distant horizon of my darkened life felt the joy and the gladness of the faintest warning ray of coming day. The clouds around the east seemed moving westward in banks of burnished silver, breaking, unveiling for me the first bright flush of morning. No inclination with me at that moment could have been stronger than to remain where I was, watching that open window, sure that, ere long, Mina must return to it, if for nothing more than to close it, giving me more glimpse of her. For that I would have waited patiently the whole night long. Without any conscious volition, however, and evidently against every inclination of the moment, I turned deliberately and walked rapidly away. Stranger still to me even at that moment, was the fact that instead of going home I found myself hurrying at once to my studio.

It was Sunday morning just after midnight. Entering the studio I lit a lamp and took from its hiding place the large convas, which had so long been waiting to become the companion to the "Night." What was my intention? I say it soberly and truthfully: when I took a crayon in my hand and stood before that blank canvas I had absolutely no knowledge of what I proposed to do or why. I knew no more about it than I knew in those morning mists upon the Rhine why it was that I was leaving Boppard. I had even been for some minutes engaged upon my work before the outlines appearing suddenly aroused me to the fact that I was drawing upon the canvas the rock, the river, the vision of Mina, as I had seen them in my dream—the design for my "Morning."

When once I understood it I laughed outright and said:

"Of course! What else could possibly have been the completion of the prophecy, the professional triumph of my life, the victory for Mina and for me but the Lorelei?"

There was no need of a sketch to copy, any more than there had been a need of the real rock, over the river, the day when I made the first study from that dream for my father's inspection. Only the summit of the rock appeared, filling the lower part of the canvas, and a shimmer of water at the bottom, as though in the distance far below: while seated upon the brow of the cliff was the life-size figure, not wrapped in mantling clouds and mists as I had vaguely planned for the "Sunrise," but enveloped in golden hair: a halow of inherent light it should be, if all the power and inspiration in me could reproduce the effect as I had seen it that night, in the window. While I was drawing I saw the whole complete in color; fancy after fancy followed my crayon as it led me on; for before I had finished the details in my mind, my hand had already finished them upon the canvas.

Call it inspiration. Call it what you will, I am sure of one thing that it was not I: for without an erasure or a single appreciable endeavor o accomplish something which did not result, or produce a thought which would persistently appear imperfect, the work went on. As if I stood as I had so often, behind my father's chair, watching him work, during my first lessons, I stood then before that canvas, equally conscious that I was not doing the work myself.

As the first warm light of morning deadened the yellow of the lamp-light I knew that the drawing was finished: not because I scanned it as usual with critical study, adding a suggestion here and changing there a line a hair's breadth, in the hope of improving it, wondering if this might not be better so, or that some other way, but simply because my hand unconsciously laid down the crayon. I knew that it was finished; I knew that it was right.

Pushing back my stool I stood at a distance, and surveyed the work with a sigh of complete satisfaction. Has ever an artist lived who could boast of such a sentiment for a drawing which was his own? To me the results of such investigation had always been disgust, and terminated in an angry exclamation: "I must change this. I must wipe out that. Bah! It is all horrible. Why can I never do what I think I am doing?"

CHAPTER XVI.

YOU CANNOT DO BETTER.

I slept upon the divan for an hour, then took my palette and brushes and began to paint. The early morning light flooded my studio from the southeast, then it came from the south, then lingering over the western hills, and darkness drove me from the easel, still unconscious of fatigue or hunger.

Upon reaching my home I found a note from my worthy instructor, good old Prof. Scarlatu, courteously asking me when he was to see me again. Involuntarily I wrote beneath his signature one word: "Never," and returned it to him as my reply. I fully intended going again to my midnight watch upon Arno, for Mina was to be in Florence but three nights more; but to my own surprise, rising from the supper table I deliberately went to my bedroom and undressed.

Discovering that I was retiring at such an unseeming hour, a servant anxiously inquired if I was ill. My only reply was an order for breakfast a half hour before sunrise in the morning, and he left me visibly convinced that I had gone mad.

It seems peculiar to me, as I think over it that no uneasiness or nervousness possessed me that night as I laid my head upon the pillow. I had become so accustomed from my earliest recollection, to feeling that I was a helpless atom, wholly in the controlling power of some guiding hand, that to have the impression strengthened a little by such experiences as I had just passed through, rather tendered to make me less independent and less mindful of to-morrow till the morrow came. As I entered the studio the next morning, however, I was conscious of a strange and unnatural timidity. I seemed alone and as though I was seriously lacking something which I had possessed. I could not tell what it was, but I sat for an hour before the canvas, helplessly holding a brush in my hand, without so much as touching it to the palette. Was the power all gone from me? I began to tremble and bitterly regret that I had left the studio the night befor. Thus bemoaning my utter powerlessness when left to my own resources, my thoughts ran back and back, retracing the steps which I had taken to reach that day, till I was wandering again upon the Rhine with Mina, till I was drawing for her the battle scene upon the wall, till I was dreaming again in the attic chamber. Then, suddenly, strength came to my arm, the power returned to me and I began to paint. The canvas was so large that I could work upon different parts of it, giving each an opportunity to dry, which was fortunate for when the power again possessed me I could no more have stopped painting than I could have begun without it.

With all the eagerness of a spectator I watched my brush as it hurried on without an error, without a moment's hesitation, without suggestion. I felt an unseen hand on mine and an irresistible guidance of an intelligence that was beyond me, and more and more as the hours passed I understood how I felt that power for years; how it had possesion of me in my little attic chamber; how it had led me to the Lorelei and held me there; how it had placed a mirror to my face showing me the end from the begin- and how the beginning and end of it was this painting of the Lorelei.

I knew then why it was that, at last, the power was so strong upon me. This was its final effort. For twelve years it had been with me, speaking to me in many tongues even bringing to me the same message. I had often dumbly wondered what the message was, but had thought less of it than the singing of the Lorelei, aud had never comprehended its warning. Now I felt instinctively that, with the completion of this painting, the promise of victory would bo fulfilled, and that with it the guiding power would go from me and the message depart unheeded, his patient labor with me lost through my own blindness and bigotry. Sampson's locks were being shorn with every stroke of my brush upon the canvas. I could not have realized the fact more clearly had a finger of fire written it for me upon the wall. I saw and knew that I was building there a tomb that was to have and to hold the dust of my own ambition; the sum and substance, the very flesh and fulness of all that I was, all that I had ever hoped or tried to be, and, in defiance of the message which I might have heeded, if I would, all that I ever should be; leaving outside the tomb a skeleton.

Such were the gloomy foreboding thoughts that filled me while I worked. They were not, one must admit, the eager and intense desires called inspiration which might naturally thrill the soul of one producing his life's masterpiece.

Doubtless the application of a little practical philosophy might, even then, have suggested a valuable lesson to me in the fact that it was because the full satisfaction of all my hope, the complete conjugation of my verb to be, the accurate solution of my life's one equation, all centered in the ambition to paint a perfect picture, and because I had so utterly failed to provide any other flesh about me, that when it was accomplished it must leave me a skeleton. But alas! At that porteous moment, when philosophy might at least have left me a parting blessing, I was beyond the reach of it. At that last moment I cared less for the secret that to which I should have listened, than ever before in my life. The mission of the prophet, what that to me? It was the power and not the principle to which I turned for help; the ruling passion growing strong in death. I saw all more vividly than I have been able to express it, yet cried in defiance, "Do with me what you will, only let my 'Morning' be perfect."

The day wore away and the night was upon me; but I dare not to lay my palette and brushes for instant, lest that power should slip from me. Thus, holding them in one hand, with the other I lit all the lamps in the studio and arranged them behind me and just above my head, and, quivering in every nerve from the intense excitement I painted on, and through that night I was not once perplexed about the result of any combination, though the tint required were the palest orange or the most delicate violet. The result of the lamplight upon my palette did not seem different from what it might have been at any time, and I am not sure that I really recognized the appropriate tints in combining; but I seemed to see the exact effect of each blending, and I have often been less positive and in the end less accurate in the daylight than I was that night.

Icy perspiration stood upon my forehead as I bent over my idol working at last upon the face. The eyes! Ah, how they shone and flashed for me. Like the clear, living blue of heaven they glowed among the shadows of the wayward tresses of golden hair. The parted half-smiling lips seemed ever and again to move and whisper, "Victory! Victory!" Nature was not natural nor life more lifelike. The light was the very sunshine, not gathering over a distant hill but radiating from the face, glowing through the golden hair of the goddess of the morning. A harp rested upon the oval of the knee, and the delicate fingers touched the strings. I even thought that I could hear the melody as they sent the strains of dawn stealing into the silent air of the dying night below.

Did a master ever see such attributes in a creation of his own? Yet I knew that they were there as well as I knew that from the bare canvas not a single touch was mine.

Three weeks and a day I had worked upon the "Night," and thought it a marvel of speed. Two days and a night I painted upon the "Morning," and it was finished. Was that my work?

The day dawned. The brightest and the best of the morning light flooded my studio. My hands fell, powerless, upon my knees, unable longer to hold either brush or palette, and by that I knew that the work was completed. Trembling I extinguished the useless lights and raising the curtains, walked to the opposite end of the studio and turned to examine the result. Breathlessly I stood there, in much the same mood, only vastly intensified, as I had stood in my father's studio years before, wrapped in awe before his marvellous productions. Carefully I examined every light and shadow, every thought and outline. Could a touch better it? Could a shadow or lighting bring out anything? No. The morning without was not more bright. Mina was not more beautiful. In every line and feature it was Mina. Was it my Mina? In every soul and sentiment it was morning. Was it my morning?

In the warm, clear light of that spring dawn I examined it with the most eager and anxious care, to catch the slightest trace of any error in the night work; but even among the softest tints there was not a flaw which the daylight could discover.

While I stood thus engaged a cold breeze blew over me, and, with a shudder, I turned to discover the cause. Then, suddenly, I became aware of one standing beside me, intensely absorbed in gazing upon the Lorelei.

"Father! Father!" I cried, and sprang to embrace him.

It was just as it had been upon the Rhine, when I turned from the Lorelei to see him and spring toward him. He stepped back to avoid me, but did not move his eyes from the canvas. Trembling I paused, afraid, for some reason, to approach him again or even to speak; but how proud I was, as I saw the admiration glowing in his face and eyes.

At last he spoke to me, in the same low voice and deliberate way that had ever curbed the turbid current of my life, turning whithersoever he would, saying:

"Anthony, dear boy, you have conquered at last. You have done all that you wished to do, all that you will ever do with the brush. Now let the captive go. You have kept your word and studied faithfully. I have fulfilled my promise. You cannot do better."

"Father!" I cried, clutching for the loved form that was fading away from me. "Father!" I gasped, groping for the guiding power that led me and was leading me. My hand fell through the empty air. As upon the Rhine the mists engulfed him, and as upon the Rhine I fell senseless toward his retreating figure, and lay, unconscious, at the feet of the Lorelei.

Two days and a night tired nature had toiled for that upon the Rhine. Two days and a night tired nature had toiled for this upod the Arno.

CHAPTER XVII.

A LIVING SKELETON.

Night was again approaching when the bursting of the lock on the inner door aroused me from stupor and two of the house servants entered, accompanied by my father's banker and a stranger. While they were lifting me and placing me upon a divan one of them said:

"Poor fellow! He has heard it already and it has gone hard with him."

"It would be like to," said a servant. "For they were more the like of friends about the house than of father and son."

Struggling to shake off the stupor and raising myself I gasped:

"What do you say? What do you mean? Speak! some of you, speak!"

"I assure you, Signor Winthrop," said the banker, that we have not ceased searching for you since we received the news."

"What news? What news?" I shrieked.

They looked at each other and shook their heads. Then the stranger said:

"The news that on Sunday morning, just after midnight, your father died, at Cairo."

"My father died!" I cried, springing upon the divan. "You are a liar! He was in this room and talked with me at sunrise this morning."

I clutched the stranger by the throat, but they overpowered me, and in a raving delirium carried me to my home. There opiates quieted me and I slept; slept till the morning and again till almost night. Then I woke weak but rational, and in spite of every protestation I rose, dressed, and went again to my studio. I was tormented with a suspicion that what I remembered was all a dream, and I was well satisfied to discover that the "Morning" was at least a reality.

The passion which had come upon me so suddenly, just after midnight on Sunday morning, was now explained. I understood my unaccountable reply to Prof. Scarletti. I saw why I dreaded leaving the easel and was in such demoniac haste to finish the work; for until I had conquered the captive could not go. His pledge had bound him to me till he had given me the reward of my labor.

The reward of my labor! "You cannot do better." That was what I had sought for. It was the ultra hope of my empty dream, and suddenly it appeared to me that, instead of a triumphant shout, it told in mournful numbers the desperate catastrophe which had overtaken me that I could not do better. Faintly I began to comprehend that, after all, it was more a verdict then a commendation; an adverse verdict; a cry of derision: "You cannot do better."

With all the resources afforded me I did that alone which had facilitated my approach to the end which I had at last attained. I had utilized all my powers to that achievement, and laughing at my utter destruction the mocking echo seemed repeating: "You cannot do better. You are utterly incapable of doing any better. You have blown a beautiful bubble; see it burst! You have received what you asked of your father. You have done all that you attempted for Mina. You have thrown your opportunities to the wind. Now rest on the bristling stubble, pillowed by the pleasant memory that you have won. You have accomplished all that you have attempted, and you cannot do better."

Alas! As ever, when I had conquered and let the captive go I began to comprehend the message. I saw how weak had been the premises of my syllogysm, how poor had been my argument, how fallacious my philosophy, how great my misapprehension, how miserable my theories of the omnific spontaneity of love, how completely my life was a failure.

Thus again, it was all for the past; stil without a word for the future. I was ever so busy looking backward that I never once thought of looking forward.

Except in composition I could see no possible difference between the two.

In such an agony as one can only appreciate who has suffered, I turned to my case of color tubes and with trembling hands tore open one after another, daubing the contents in shapeless masses over the rosewood cover of my desk. Color! True colors! They were all there; but I, a bleached and shivering skeleton, stood over them utterly unable to tell one from the other. Enthroned at my feast of victory I read the finger-writing on the wall, as it traced for me the conclusion of the whole matter.

"Color-blind!"

It seems but little to me, now, only to have been color-blind. I can sit with patience, yes, even with interest, and discuss with able physicians their various theories: over-work, exhaustion, a fearful strain of the optic nerves, through the long night, to catch, in the lamplight, the reality in shade of the changed colors; then the reaction, the fall, the delirium, all conducing to optical paralysis, which began the color-blindness and since has become complete. I can listen even with delight, now.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Touching Loyalty.

The grand old Douglas motto, "Tender and True," was once touchingly illustrated by the representative of another Scotch family. The Duke of Athole had a disease which was certain to end fatally. When he was assured that he would soon be taken away, he called on all his tenants, and bade each one farewell with a cheerfulness that testified to his peace of mind. During his last days there occurred a touching incident, which is told in Blackwood's.

Queen Victoria visited Blair-Athole to bid adieu to the dying Duke. She had returned to the station, where a crowd of persons had collected, but in sympathy with the solemnity of the occasion, they maintained perfect silence.

The train was about to start, when there was a shout of "Stop! stop!" and a brougham was seen driving rapidly from the castle.

Out of it, wrapped in flannels, staggered the Duke. He went to the door of the royal car, knelt, kissed the Queen's hand, waved his cap called out, "Three cheers for the Queen!" Then re-entering his carriage, he drove back to the castle, and never left it again alive.

Convicting Proof.

Judy—"Do you 'tink you love me, Dinnis?"

Dennis—"Go way now, darlint; av coorse oi do."

Judy—"How do you know it, Dinnis?"

Dennis—"Be the way oi appreciate yer prisince when oi'm away from ye."

Preparing for a Cyclone.

"Marriage licenses here?" he whispered to the Clerk.

"Yes."

"Get one any week day?"

"Yes."

"Girl have to be here?"

"No."

"How soon can I get one after she agrees?"

"In fifteen minutes after you get here."

"Sure, pop?"

"Yes. Any particular hurry about it?"

"There is. There's seven of us after the same girl and if she says 'Yes' to me I've got to be spliced inside of half an hour or she'll change her mind. I am just prospecting, you see. Be prepared for a cyclone about two days hence."

VENGEANCE OVERTAKES HIM.

A Tyrant Killed on the Spot Where He Slaughtered Hundreds.

Crimes of a Governor in Madagascar—He Massacres 278 Men, Women, and Children Meeting the Fate He Deserved.

Prompt vengeance has fallen upon Ramiasatra, Governor of the province of Belanona, Madagascar, who massacred 278 persons, including men, women, and children, belonging to the leading families. Despatches received say that Ramiasatra, together with his brother, who is supposed to have instigated the massacre, has been executed on the spot where the wholesale killing took place under the cruel Governor's directions.

The cause of Ramiasatra's sanguinary conduct originated in the fact that he fiercely resented a petition from the populace addressed to the Government asking protection from his repeated acts of cruelty. This so enraged him that he commenced to slaughter men, women, and children, and continued so doing for several days. In many cases the agonies of the victims were protracted by the Governor's causing their limbs to be gradually dismembered, their heads to be slowly sawed off, and by subjecting them to other acts of torture. During the course of the massacre many of the women who were put to death were first assaulted. In the case of all the victims their bodies were thrown to the dogs.

In addition to these atrocities, the survivors were compelled to erect a trophy composed of the heads of the murdered people upon a spot near the scene of the butchery.

The fury of the populace was aroused to such an extent by Ramiasatra's inhuman conduct that the Government of Madagascar was compelled to take notice of the Governor's blood-thirstiness and promised to investigate the whole affair and to punish the offenders if they were found to be guilty. This, thanks to the moral pressure brought to bear on the Government by the foreign residents, has actually been done, and Gov. Romiastra and his equally ferocious brother have met the fate which they so richly deserved.

Travellers in Egypt and on the Nile.

Just at the time when hotel proprietors in the South of France and the Riviera are bemoaning the fact that most of their hotels are comparatively empty and their district deserted, the hotel proprietors of Cairo and Messrs. Thomas Cook & Son are having to exercise all their ingenuity to find room to accommodate the great influx of visitors to Egypt. The result is that at the present time all the Cairo hotels are crowded, and the manager of each has had to take private rooms for a considerable number of guests, and Messrs Thomas Cook & Son have had to throw open their large steamer Rameses, the mail steamer Amenartas, and the Oonus as floating hotels to relieve the hotel proprietors for a few days during the pressure on them, which was considerably augmented by the large number of travellers from the Augusta Victoria, who went to Cairo and visited Sakkara, the Pyramids, &c., and have now left to visit Palestine. It may be mentioned that between the 7th and 10th of Feburary no fewer than 250 first class passengers left Cairo, under the arrangements of Messrs. Thomas Cook & Son, for Upper Egypt, including 32 by the regular mail service from Assiout, and 33 by the new mail service leaving Cairo. At the present time Messrs. Thomas Cook & Son calculate tha they have on the river and in the hotels at Luxur at least 700 travellers. This is the greatest number of tourists that has ever been recorded on the river at any one date, and there is no doubt that the large amount of money circulated in Upper Egypt will be fully appreciated by the natives and will be of great benefit to the country.—[Egyptain Gazette.

Sensational Scene in a Circus.

A shocking scene was witnessed at the Paris Hippodrome the other afternoon in connection with the preparations for the production of a sensational work, "Neron," in which wild beasts are brought into the arena to simulate an attack on Christians, who are represented by wooden figures dressed and painted. After the trainer, Seets, had put six lions through their exercise, they were all safely lodged in their cage, with the exception of one, which refused to follow the others, and took refuge behind a partition. Notwitstanding the repeated efforts of the employes and the trainer himself, they were unable to drive the lion out of its improvised den. Seets, armed with a lance, then advanced resolutely up the passage, and was endeavouring to harpoon the beast, when his weapon slipped out of his grasp, and before he could pick it up the lion sprang forward and seized him by the leg. In a few seconds the tamer was covered with blood. "It is all over with me," he shouted, as the assistants rushed forward to his rescue. Happily a workman belaboured the brute about the head, and a trainer lancing it about the forehead, compelled it to relinquish its prey. Seets, on being removed to the director's office, was found to be suffering from deep wounds in the thighs and legs. His injuries were attended to at once, but as complications may set in, the doctors will not be able to pronounce upon his condition until a week or so hence.

Berlin a Prey to Robbers.

There has been of late an alarming recrudescence of daring burglaries and robberies, accompanied by violence, in Berlin, Germany. The streets at night have become notoriously unsafe, and for a time it seemed as if the police were powerless o protect the public from the depredations to organized bands of spoliators, who prosecutf ed their nefarious calling with the most reckless audacity. Some sensational revelasions are about to be made as to the exploits of these marauders, three separate gangs of whom have at length been captured, and will be shortly brought to trial. They were well-organised bands, with minute-books, balance-sheets, and other official records. The captain of one of the gangs acted as secretary to all three, and attended to the booking of the affiliated organisations. The second gang is charged with the perpetration of no fewer than 70 burglaries. The third band consisted for the most part of boys and youths, and seems o have constituted a kind junior auxiliary f the elder organisations.