

THE PRIMA DONNA.

CHAPTER XX.—(CONTINUED).

With its curious—almost prophetic—eccentricity I recalled the last Persian poem which I had translated for my profession in Florence. The argument was all that I remembered, but in it I seemed to see myself and to receive a vague suggestion for the future. It was this:

"Proue upon the sand extended,
Shadows with a shadow blended;
Hidden in a deep recess
Of Persia's prodden wilderness.
Fiercely at the far west lying,
Flashed the day, in crimson dying,
Pervading Persia's wilderness."

"And the fiery crimson lining,
On the desert's silver shining,
Left the shadow's deep impress:
Phantom of the wilderness!
(One from Ishmael descended,
With his knee to Allah bended)
And his cry of deep distress
Awoke the sleeping wilderness.
Facing then the fiery shading
From the east in darkness fading,
Thus, to Mecca, to address
His prayer, in Persia's wilderness!"

"'Nammi Ullah ki walhamdah!
Pleaded low the Persian mandah,
'Thou, and thou alone, canst bless
Thy power pervades the wilderness."

"Lo! The prayer returned in blessing;
And, the prostrate form addressing,
Spoke an angel—nothing less:
'O Pilgrim of the wilderness!
By the grace of Allah, bending
From His throne of light, and sending
Snorer, lo! for thy distress
I come to tread thy wilderness.
Look about thee and discover
That for which, thy bondage over,
Thou wast erst in eagerness
To probe the prodden wilderness."

"He turned to obey, but in dismay
He beheld the angel grow old and gray
And to the desert, drearily
Stretching before him, wearily
Turn to the pilgrim's prodden way."

"'Bismillah! For me thou shalt not be
Aged and old and gray!' cried he.
'Allah forbid it! I will not boast
Salvation purchased at such cost;
Why should my crime be laid to thee?'"

"'Thy crime shall be dead,' the angel
Said
'As dieth the day in yon gloaming, red,
But God nor man can blessing bring
Without vicarious suffering—
The joy that suffers in other's stead.'

"'Naught have I done, immortal one,
That my curse from me to thee should
Run.'

That day I wrote to my father's bankers, requesting them to order the disposal of everything belonging to me and to forward the proceeds at the earliest possible moment. Then I waited. The sum was larger than I had hoped for and in itself it gave me courage. It was accompanied, however, by a very curious letter that was full of vague suggestions, from which it was easy to discover that my old friend in Florence had no suspicion whatever that I had been in an abnormal state, and were not only chagrined and astounded in the transformation that had taken place in me, after my father's death, but were seriously offended, too, over the brutal defiance I had exhibited; but I did not write again to gather further information or offer any further explanation. I knew of no apology for what I had been, and was eager that the dead past should hasten to bury its dead out of the way of what I hoped to be for the future. Where could I go? Should it be back to Italy? No. To Germany? No. Remain in Paris? No. What then? Why, my dear friend, that is the answer to the question which you asked me at the outset, and which started me off upon this long egotistical ramble. That, indeed, is how and why I came to America.

Life without a charm, love without a hope, determination without an ambition, a past without pride and a future without promise, all came, as boon companions, with me. The rest you remember; that is, I take it for granted that you do. How I first taught drawing and then the languages, and obtained a professorship in your grand university. You know how many friends I found in that generous contiguity of charity for all, making life's desert blossom with roses, and malice for none, robbing the roses of their thorns. My only disappointment was in my failure to do, in charity, some deed which I might fondly fancy tended toward atonement; for I met with so much of precisely what I would have bestowed upon others that I found myself imperfectly able to return kindness with kindness.

You remember when Mina made her first grand triumph in America, how you went with the throngs that gathered to hear her sing, and how you joined in those ovations and wondered that I, so fond of music, would let anything call me away from the city while she was there. Now you understand it was because I knew at last my utter unworthiness and dared not to risk some fatal accident that might have brought us face to face. The love was still in my heart, you see, as dominant as ever, but it had changed from that audacious selfishness to a timid but all-absorbing devotion. Twice Mina's scorn had only angered me, but at last I had reached a state where I knew that a rebuke from her would kill me; and I could not rest in the city until I knew that she was gone.

The next time that she came to America you remember I was blind. I no longer feared that I might see her. The injury which I had done to my eyes in Florence, and the insult added in Paris, had reached the fulness of retributive justice in depriving me of the power to distinguish not color from color alone, but day from night. It was just ten years since I had turned into the new way, and, in the final deprivation, I had joy, at least, in the discovery that, during that time, I had made some little progress in the way of doing better. Upon waking in the morning to realize that I was blind, I did not turn at once to torment myself with my own misery, as before, but, to my astonishment, began to set in order many things about it which seemed to me to call for gratitude; for the sake of the friends about me I was glad that there was no apparent change in my eyes, so far as the world saw them, and for myself I was inexpressibly grateful that it had not come

ten years earlier, in Paris; then withal, when I had so heartily abused that which I once possessed, what reason could I urge why I should not patiently endure the loss of that which I had once abused?

CHAPTER XXI. THE MORNING.

Leonora's curse was satisfied. For the first time and the last I had looked into the eyes I loved, over her lifeless breast. A thorny path had been the one which I had followed to see the sunrise. My day had dawned in darkness, and, verily, my mournful light fell upon a cloud and not on me. Yet, withal, into my darkness there stole the brightness of a shining of a quiet, peaceful morning. It was not the rapturous triumph of egotism which I had so earnestly sought. It was not the dazzling triumphant morning which my ambition had painted, but the still, soft reflection of the silver lining of the cloth, falling in mercy upon a penitent in sackcloth and ashes, humbly bending to the rod that smote him, kissing the gentle hand of Fate that had allowed him ten years for something a little better than that which he had evolved for himself, up to the time when he touched the hem of Mina's garment.

Thanks to the kindness of friends I found myself in this delightful home upon the Hudson. I have never seen the "Rhine without a citadel of tyranny," but as I hear its murmur from my veranda, I seem to know it is as an old friend, for I recall the vivid pictures which my father painted for me, with his pen, long years ago, when he was wandering upon its banks. And, fortunately though I possessed sufficient means to support myself with moderate economy, it has not proved necessary for me to live an utterly useless life. Thanks to my father, I yet had the talent of an education, and, to utilize it, found some young men whose ambitions led them higher than poverty allowed them to aspire, and for them I opened a free evening school fitting them for college. This soon so far outgrew its limits that through the day I found myself conducting a real private school of languages.

It was a suggestive thought, occasionally coming into my mind, that this capacity, without which my life would now be such an utter blank, where instead it has been filled with pleasure, was the only acquisition which I had not abused, and the only good thing which I had received, for which I had failed to find any abnormal adaptation to the aim of one ambition.

Ere long it was absolutely necessary that I have an assistant, and I had hardly realized the need when, providentially, a colleague was secured for me, possessing all the requirements for the peculiar position. He was a German youth of superior education and remarkable ability, and at once he grew so much into my life, as well as my labor, that I wondered how I had ever succeeded without him. Though young, he was skilled in all the modern languages, and was more apt than I in imparting them, so that he soon relieved me entirely in that department, while, in our hours of rest, he was so much a companion and friend as well that, in time, I found myself almost kneeling at a confessional while we conversed.

It was the first time in my life that I had ever experienced the delight of whispering life's sentiments and sorrows to a sympathetic ear. Perhaps I might wisely have heard an admonitory whisper saying: "Go bury thy sorrow, the world has its share. Go bury it deeply. Go hide it with care." But I thought of the German proverb: "Durch Erfahrung wird man klug," and hoped that my experience might be for my young friend the wisdom which my father's would have been for me had I given my thoughts to his warnings. Here it would have ended had not my colleague beguiled me with shrewd and searching questions, delicately hidden in susceptible excuses, till, unwittingly, I was led deeper and deeper in the confessing, till, at last, everything was confessed. It came about more in the way of discussion than as at an open confession, and we argued warmly sometimes over the various motives and lack of motives; first and second causes and extent of responsibility; having what my companion would laughingly call an hour at metaphysics when the pupils left us to be our own teachers.

I protested that my own life was being made too much the text book, but my colleague only laughed and said: "That is quite as it should be, Professor, for it is a book which you can read." I remarked, too, that the ground which he took in arguing was always one to palliate my errors and find plausible excuses therefor. Laughing again, he said: "We never see ourselves as others see us. Sometimes it is for better; sometimes it is for worse. We may have the right of it, I suppose, and equally well we may have the wrong. For years, as you say, Professor, you had yourself very much better than you really were. I wonder if it be not possible that, in the reaction, you are now far enough the other way to make up in all a fair average."

Well, it was thus that I told my story, and this it is, just as I am sending it to you now; for, unseen by my blind eyes, while I told it my colleague was transcribing it word for word, as he drew from me the story of my life.

It was while this was going on that we discussed the errors and weaknesses, which to-day I so bitterly regret, and I gained a much clearer understanding of myself, which would very greatly aid me—if I were to live my life over.

"We are coming to the end," I said, one day, "and I am hoping that you will permit it, that your life shall be the next volume for us to study. We shall have a happier time of it, I am sure, my friend, for it stands without saying, it sounds in your very voice, that we shall have sunshine instead of clouds to discuss, and after my night we shall the better appreciate your morning."

"When we have done with this volume, you shall choose the next according to your pleasure," he replied. "If you wish to discuss my life, why—yes, there will be sunshine; but no morning sun shines the whole day. The sword of Damocles, unseen, hangs over many a sovereign of sunshine. The skeleton, unnoticed, stands in its closet behind the chair of many a host, of smiles. To close an investigation may cut that hair and unbolt that door, but there is no need of shaking the skeleton prematurely. 'Sufficient unto the day,' you know, Professor, and we have yet the pleasant part of the present volume left to us. I assure you that it has been to me interesting, suggestive, instructive and why, I can hardly say what it has not been to me. We have at least an hour before sunset, and I am eager for what

is to come. Let us proceed to the last chapter. You found—

CHAPTER XXII. THE LAST CHAPTER.

"—You found that you were blind. How did you think of it?"

"It seemed to me more of a just reward than what we unjustly call a punishment," I replied. "And my chief regret is that I have so poorly succeeded in anything more than repaying kindness with kindness; doing so little as casting bread upon the waters, so little loving as God loves."

"To what end?" he asked.

"That to me (and to her, I suppose, if she should ever know of it) it might be a guaranty that my desire at least was to do better."

"Do you know the effect of every act, considered by divine economy, so well that you can say to a certainty that you have failed?" he asked.

"Surely," I replied, "eoto knows much if not all instinctive even him and reflex action."

"What, then," he asked, "is your criterion?"

"The consciousness of personal sacrifice and the heart's appreciable benefit," I responded promptly.

There was a curious solemnity in the full, rich voice that, without further comment, repeated:

"Have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name cast out demons and in Thy name done many wonderful works?"

"You are right," I said, smiling. "You have the Master's authority when you depreciate a confidence in that criterion, so far as the soul's here after faith is considered; but what, for instance, would you suggest as an established criterion for him who longs for something of that consolation here?"

Again the full, melodious voice replied: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these..."

"That," I replied with a deep sigh, "is the gentle criterion established by the ineffable love of the Most High. God grant me mercy upon a judgment more charitable than I could judge. I think you are bringing too much of the hereafter as an element in the here. When, for myself, I cannot, who shall I venture to ask of another mortal to look at me through the eyes of the Almighty?"

"It needs not the Infinite, Professor. The very finite mind can easily realize that to err is but a human weakness. Who has not erred?" he asked.

"To forgive is a divine compassion," I replied. "And when I have been so egregiously human is there any justice in my thinking that she should be divine?"

There was a moment's pause, followed by five words of such strange complication that they startled me: "Her God has forgiven you?"

It did not appear as an interrogation, but as the shadow of a thought, falling accidentally upon the tongue, without intention, and equally without consideration I replied:

"Unworthy as I am, I surely trust with all my soul that her God has forgiven me." Again a moment's pause, and again that gentle voice pronounced the startling enquiry: "Is she greater than her God?"

I could not see my companion's face, but I knew that the soul of sympathy was in it and was not angry; but feeling that we had carried the discussion too far, I replied:

"If I could feel, some day, only that she saw in the past, in my waywardness, something, after all, of the imperfect love I bore her, that she were willing to find such excuses as you have found, dear friend; that when she thought of me she realized that, at the least, I had tried to do better; that she knew how bitterly I regret that so often and so much my thoughts have wronged her; if I could feel this, dear friend, I should be happy. I should possess infinitely more of forgiveness than I can ever hope for or deserve."

His startling comment was: "Who knows but love may still abide with her?"

"Love!" I exclaimed. "Love in her heart for me? Dear friend, how soon you have forgotten all that I have told you of myself. Love overcoming such abhorrence? Love for a blind man?"

"I am thinking more of what you have told me about her," my friend replied, speaking very slowly. "You have not represented her as being less than human, that she should so persist in condemnation. I do not believe that she is cruel. Forgive me, Professor, I am speaking from my heart. Such sentiments as were provoked by yesterday to be drawn into today would simply be diabolical. I can better believe that even now, she is tormented, yes, more than you have been, with thoughts that she has been in the wrong. Nay, Professor, let me speak, for it is in my heart. What if she realized she had erred? What if as bitterly as you, and as earnestly she longed to be forgiven? I will speak it, Professor; it has grown and grown upon me. You shall not interrupt me until I am done, for you are doing her to-day a great injustice. You are wronging her to think that she cannot forgive. Nay, I can almost believe, at this moment, that she is thinking that after her cruelty to you, though that, too, was meant in love, it is you, instead, who cannot forgive. Pardon me, Professor; in my earnestness I forgot to be respectful; but I believe that she is right; I believe that she has carried her austerity too far. I believe at this moment she would gladly come to you and tell you of her penitence, with tears in her eyes acknowledging she had blundered, that when she might have opened her arms to you, as her longing heart had urged her, she had misjudged you and driven you farther into wrong. Oh, I wish I could open your heart to understand it so. Perhaps she might do it. If she were to make some great sacrifice; if she were to give up all the world to be with you now, to try to prove to you her love and her sorrow, and if, upon her knees, she should plead with you and tell you how blank and empty was the world to her, till you forgave her and took her to your heart again, as the only loving, longing hope of all her life—Think of it—Professor! I tell you it is possible. Think of it. Could you not, would you not believe her?"

"Dear friend," I replied after a moment's pause, almost choking with emotion. "No, I should not believe it, even if Mina herself should say to me that she was cruel or wrong. Your kind heart is too full of sympathy for what I am to appreciate what I have been."

He had nothing more to say, and we sat a little longer in silence. Then I heard his

step as he crossed the room, and I knew that he was standing by the open window.

"Is it sunset yet?" I asked. But he made no reply. He was thinking too deeply; thinking of my sorrow. I could hear him sigh but nothing more, till softly, like the distant warble of a bird when one must breathe lightly to listen, and be sure that it is a bird, there came from the window a quivering note and another of that dear old song of which we had been talking:

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

How strangely my life had woven itself in and out of that song, till Mina, my father, my friend, in thinking of me must think of the Lorelei. For a moment I thought that my heart had borne me back to Boppard, and forgot that it was my companion who was singing, unconsciously, as his thoughts of me wove themselves about the song of the Lorelei. He had never sung before, but, even in that simple strain, there was the force of a rich, melodious voice that thrilled me, almost as when Mina had sung it upon the Arno. I would not ask him to sing louder, for he could not sing it so sweetly if he were conscious, but rising, softly, I approached him needing no guiding hand if the Lorelei led me on. I had almost reached the window when he began the last verse and a sudden pang of regret shot from my heart. In the strange joy that had filled me with that singing I had not thought of the little trill at the end; the rest might be almost as sweet as Mina could have sung it, but that trill was more than all the song to me. I could have stopped him, but each note breathed so much of a warm heart's sympathy, that, for his love for me, I thought it were better that I should suffer than that he should know how his song had caused me pain, and thus I stood in silence as each clear note fell—a sad, sweet memory of the lost, the unforgotten:

"Ich glaube die Wellen verschlingen
Am Ende Schiffer und Kahn;
Und das hat mit ihrem Singen
Die Lorelei gethan."

Boppard! Florence! That trill!

"Mina! My Mina!" I cried, springing forward. And two arms wound tenderly about my neck, and a loving whisper upon my ear:

"Yes, Carlo! My Carlo! Mina is here; not to forgive, Carlo! Mina is here; Only believe me! Only take me to your heart again!"

And this is what, with her singing, my Lorelei has done.

What then? Why, for you, too, God grant it, out of the night into the morning.

[THE END.]

WILL LIE IN ONE GRAVE.

Love and Death Achieve a Victory Over Poverty.

Romantic Story of Russian Pride That is Interesting Paris—Youthful Lovers Reunited in Their Old Age as a Prelude to a Double Tragedy.

A despatch from Paris says:—A strange, romantic story is to-day the topic of the hour in the Russian colony here, a tale of true affection, enduring and at last triumphant, but the hero and heroine of which have between them very little of the youth or beauty that are naturally associated with "love's young dream." Among the noble families of Moscow are the De Markoffs. Some half century ago they were represented by the Fiodor de Markoff, who, with his charming wife and three beautiful daughters, added lustre to the best social circles of that city.

OF THE DAUGHTERS KATRINA was the youngest and most lovely. Feted by her friends, courted by many admirers and idolized by her parents, her life appeared to offer exceptionally brilliant attractions to the fair girl over whose cradle all the good fairies would seem to have watched and endowed her with remarkable gifts. Yet, at the very threshold of her career, Mlle. de Markoff met with a disappointment that embittered her existence and tinged her life to its very close. Katrina, naturally of an affectionate disposition, had loved and loved early, but the youth whom she desired to make happy was only a poor cavalry subaltern, Lieut. Armigoff, who, though of gentle birth, had neither money nor influence wherewith to open for him the gates of promotion. She might as well, so far as the realization of her dream was concerned, have kept her preference

SECRET EVEN FROM ITS OBJECT. Fiodor de Markoff, however, had quite other designs for his daughter and naturally objected to allowing the gem of his family to be enshrined in a setting in no way worthy of its rare brilliancy. In due time poor Katrina was wooed and wedded by Colonel de Fisher, a member of the Czar's personal staff and occupying one of the most important posts in the Imperial household. Here the young dame of Moscow took her place and in the Court festivities was remarked by all as a most valued accession. For a time the constant round of gaiety and her naturally high spirits seemed to have effaced all traces of her early sorrows from Katrina's mind.

BUT APPEARANCES WERE DECEPTIVE. When some ten years had elapsed Colonel de Fisher, who was still the Czar's favored servant and had seen several olive branches spring up about his board, was suddenly attacked by a malignant disease, to which he succumbed after a brief illness. His widow left with her children and a handsome fortune, decided to remove to Paris the better to educate them. Perhaps she was influenced by the fact that Lieutenant Armigoff had resigned from the army on learning of Katrina's marriage and gone to the French capital to gain a precarious livelihood by giving lessons in languages and fencing. Arrived in Paris, Mme. de Fisher at once took the social position to which her antecedents in St. Petersburg entitled her and she was able, in a few years, to see her daughter comfortably settled in life and her sons started in remunerative careers.

BUT EVEN IN EXILE KATRINA was not destined to be happy. Before she had attained her fiftieth birthday her children had died and her fortune been dissipated through the speculations of an executor in St. Petersburg. She was thenceforth reduced to the necessity of depending on her relatives in Moscow, who, for the past ten

years, have allowed her a pension of 8,000 francs (\$1,600) from the family estate. On this pittance poor Mme. de Fisher has managed to live, although, of course, compelled to retrench largely and virtually retire from the social sphere in which she formerly lived. Such was the status of affairs when one day last October Mme. de Fisher was at once shocked and delighted by meeting, while taking her daily walk in the Champs Elysees, with Lieutenant Armigoff, whom she had not seen since he bade her adieu

JUST BEFORE HER MARRIAGE.

She had not at first noticed the old man, who passed, looked after and then followed her, but, being at last attracted by his insistence, she retraced her steps and once she had taken a good look at him, was not long in recalling the beloved features. But how much sadness mingled with the joy of recognition! Katrina's beauty had become a thing of the past, while the ex-Lieutenant's clothing betrayed the last stage of the shabby genteel. But Katrina was equal to the occasion. She determined that her lover should share her crust, if she could not, for fear of her family, make him legally her husband. She at once hired M. Metivier (the name he had assumed on coming to Paris) as a man-of-all-work and to see that

HER APARTMENTS WERE KEPT IN ORDER.

The Lieutenant, although at first refusing to accept the bounty, was finally forced, by sheer necessity, to agree to Mme. de Fisher's plans. But even had this not been so the prospect of daily intercourse with his old love would probably have overcome all scruples. The Autumn and Winter thus passed peacefully and happily for the reunited lovers, and up to a week ago all at last seemed to betoken a calm if not joyous old age.

ONE FATAL MORNING,

however, an ominous-looking package arrived from Moscow. It contained letters from Mme. de Fisher's relatives to the effect that it was their desire that she should break up her little establishment in the aristocratic Faubourg St. Honore and retire to a home for old ladies of the upper class. They also added that the pension of 8,000 francs would be discontinued. Thus in a moment crumbled all the hopes of the at last united, all the happiness that had come, if late, to these wearied hearts. In this crisis there was but one step to take, and they took it. Going out, hand in hand, they wandered to a lonely spot by the Seine, and yesterday

THEIR BODIES WERE FOUND UNITED BY A JORD.

At Mme. de Fisher's residence the police found a note addressed to her implacable relatives at Moscow, craving money for her burial.

It seems that the family in Russia had learned the facts regarding the hiring of M. Metivier and had pierced the disguise of the former subaltern. The pension was withdrawn to force Mme. de Fisher into the home and break up the connection.

Through the courtesy of the authorities, the lovers will be buried in the same grave.

Emperor William's Rambles in Disguise.

People who imagine that his imperial Majesty passes all his time in christening new-born sons, meditating on the wickedness of Prince Bismarck, and quarrelling with Count von Waldersee are very much mistaken. He likes his fun also, and takes it. There is a certain music hall in Berlin where the Emperor enjoys adventures worthy of the Caliph Haroun Al Raschid. Whether he is recognized or not I cannot say, as his Majesty is an adept in the art of "making up." However, policemen, detectives, and others are far too wise to express suspicions in case they have some idea they are in the presence of the Lord of Germany. It is confidently said that the other day, in the guise of a Hebrew peddler, his Majesty wandered through the haunts of the Jewish community in his capital and discussed with a number of working Israelites the condition of their race in his own dominions and the effect of the harsh measures recently promulgated against them in Russia.

On another occasion the Emperor is said to have passed many hours of the night wandering among the saloons used by sailors and common soldiers, arguing and inviting criticism on the life of a private in his army or an A. B. seaman in his navy. All these things doubtless assist the young sovereign in his endeavors to act as the father of his people; but occasionally the fact that he is a young man bursts upon him, and he is apt to join in vigorous dancing, and play high jinks generally, as enthusiastically as the latest Jack ashore. Then, in the middle of a can-can or a schoppen, comes the memory, "Ich bin der Kaiser," and his temporary boon companions are surprised to see their new comrade suddenly draw himself up, turn on his heel and leave the place followed by a couple of, till that moment, supposed to be drunken chums.

The Nicaragua Canal Project 340 Years Old.

A Mexican gentleman lately gave a bit of curious history with regard to the proposed Nicaragua Canal. He said that in the early days of the Spanish occupation there was talk of a canal across the isthmus, and a Spanish explorer named Gama in 1551 indicated the Nicaragua route as the most feasible between the two seas. The Spanish Government did not at the time give the matter attention, but in 1781, desiring quicker communication between the oceans, sent out an officer named Galisteo to make a survey of three different routes, and among them that through Nicaragua. He also reported in favor of the latter, but Spain could not raise the funds for construction. In 1838 the route was again surveyed, this time by an Englishman named Bailey, who was employed by the state of Nicaragua, and again in 1851 by Col. Childs for a company which proposed to undertake the canal. Nothing came of it, but in 1873 an officer of the United States navy made the surveys which resulted in the choice of the route by the company which is now engaged on the work of the canal.

A writer in one of the New York papers says that, until very lately, nothing like the European system of tipping existed in the States, but that now tips are as freely extorted in the health or pleasure resorts, and many other places, as ever they were in London or Paris. He adds:—"And what is lamentable, we get nothing like the equivalent to the European service in return. We pay the toll and get more kicks than courtesy for it."