THE PAINTER OF PARMA;

— OR, —

THE MAGIC OF A MASTERPIECE.

CHAPTER IX.

(Continued.)

It had been, for several years, the custom of the duke to give select parties, or receptions, to a very few of the closest and most intimate friends of his fair ward and himself. They occurred once in two weeks, and were, as a rule, enjoyable. The duke could here unbend himself from the dignity of his high estate, and lay aside the cares of a jealous and critical government. He had once thought of inviting Juan Zanoni to one or more of these social gatherings; but, before doing so, he had spoken with Steffano and with Count Denaro on the subject. So we can well understand why the thought had not been carried into execution.

With regard to the Count Guiseppe Denaro we will say the duke had consulted him on the subject of the invitation to the artist, not because he had any great respect for his judgment, or, for himself personally, but simply because he had been admitted as a friend and companion—aye, and as a suitor of the Princess Isabel.

And now—did the duke regard the count as the one man fitted to be his dear ward's husband? Certainly he did not. But Isabel was already a woman, and more than a twelvemonth beyond what was generally considered the proper marriageable age, and it was to be expected that the time would ere long come when her heart would find its mate. When her guardian thought of this he cast about him for the man worthy to be her mate for life.

He was surprised at the result. Of a full score of young nobles of Parma whom he brought before his mind's eye for examination, not one approached his standard. The few who were fitted by rank and wealth to mate with her were either dissipated or of unfavorable dispositions.

Suffice it to say, in the end the Count Guiseppe had come nearer to the mark than any other; and, above and beyond that, he loved the gentle maiden with all his heart. Even he had been at times seen under the influence of much wine; but when he had asked the duke—had implored—that he might be permitted to win the love of the beautiful princess if he could, and when the subject of his habits of life had been alluded to, he pledged himself by a solemn oath, that never, never again, would he suffer wine to become his master.

Guiseppe Denaro was of an ancient family, and wealthy, and by right of inheritance he occupied a position in the front rank of the councillors of the realm. So, on the whole, Antonio could fix upon no one to whom he would more willingly give his beautiful cousin and ward, and he had given his promise to the count. If he could win the lady's hear the should have her hand.

On the evening in question—the evening on which the marquis had held his interview with old Madelon, and, later, with his brother—a gay and seemingly happy party was assembled in one of the large drawing-rooms of the ducal palace—not in the largest, but in a cosy, comfortable luxurious apartment, well fitted and furnished for social enjoyment.

As we enter neither the duke nor his brother had arrived. Count Denaro was there and had assumed the direction of affairs until the master should put in an appearance. Several others, perhaps a dozen in all, male and female, were present; and of them we find our two youthful friends, Henri Vavallia and Paulo Alavado, the pair of them evidently finding their fill of happiness in basking in the bright light of the Princess Isabel's electric smiles. And they had cause for happiness, for the princess liked them. They were intelligent and gentlemanly, and when she compared them with Count Denaro it was greatly to the disparagement of the latter. In no other respect than that of wealth was he their equal.

And in another way had they won upon her regard and liking. They were admirers of the painter, Juan Zanoni, and could not say too much in his praise. In his account of his unpleasant passage with the Marquis Steffano, Zanoni had incidentally mentioned the names of these youths, and had told her how deeply he was indebted to them for their kind offices on that occasion. As the matter was fresh in her mind, only a few hours having elapsed since her dear lover had told to her the story, it was very natural that she should, on the present occasion, ask them to give their version of the scene.

And they did it. Sitting close by her side and apart from the others, they were free to speak without reserve. Henri Vavallia was the chief spokesman though his companion was permitted to do his part. The account, as given by them, presented the painter in a far more noble and magnanimous character than his own recital had done. In fact, they pictured him not only as a moral hero, brave and generous, but as a very paladin, whose arm was invincible.

"If he were of the patrician class," said Henri, with kindling eye, "he would take rank at the very head of our aristocracy. He is one of the noblest men I ever met."

The princess thanked him with a look—a look which, though he could not know its full significance, yet gave him joy unutterable. She had just promised them that they should visit the artist's studio at some future time when she was to be present, and she was to introduce them, when the duke was announced.

Antonio came in alone, with the shadow of a deep care on his expressive face, and even when his fair ward had arisen and greeted him with her fondest smile, something of the cloud remained. He had exchanged friendly salutations with Henri and Paulo, and was about to turn to another part of the room when Isabel spoke:

"Dear guardian! Something is giving you trouble. Shall I take my lute and sing to you?"

"No, no, my blessed child. It is nothing. I have been thinking. Let us hope I may think more brightly by-and-by. Don't let me interrupt your conversation." And with this he turned and went over to where Count Denaro sat alone in the recess of one of the great windows.

The princess watched him closely and thoughtfully, wondering what could have occurred to make him so sad and gloomsome—watched him until she had seen him speak with the count and then she resumed her seat.

"What can have happened?" said Henri feelingly. "I never saw him look quite so upset."

"He has evidently heard something unpleasant," suggested Paulo. "At all events I judged so, not only from his looks, but from the manner in which he spoke. You know how quick and deep are his sympathies."

"Yes," responded Henri; "his heart is as tender as a woman's, and, if he had heard of the death or great misfortune of a dear friend he would suffer as for his own self."

The words had scarcely fallen from the youth's lips when the page at the door announced: "The Marquis of Steffano."

The name fell upon Isabel's ears with a shock. Why it should be so she could not tell; but so it was. It sent a shudder through her frame, and a pain through her heart. Was it something he had done that had caused the gloom of the duke? As the thought occurred to her she turned her eyes in his direction, and found his gaze fixed upon herself with an intentness that startled her. The count, who stood by his side, was also looking at her.

"Ah, Duke!" exclaimed Steffano, approaching his brother. "It appears our informant was right—he is beyond recovery."

"What is that?" asked Count Denaro eagerly.

"An accident to a friend of our good duke. We do not know yet how it happened. We are only informed that he can not recover."

"For mercy's sake, who is it?" cried a young lady who sat near to where they were standing. She spoke eagerly, with more of curiosity than sympathy.

"Probably a stranger to you, dear lady," answered Steffano, with a curious smile on his swart visage. "It was a painter called Zanoni.

Isabel's heart had almost ceased its throbbing at the first word of an accident, and now as that name fell upon her ear, the truth of it all appearing to have the duke's avouchment, things swam before her, the light faded away, and with a deep soul-sent groan of bitterest agony she sank back and would have fallen to the floor had not Henri and Paulo caught her and upheld her.

"My Lord Duke! Countess Rizzi! Help! help! The princess has fainted!"

The duke himself was the first to reach her. He took her in his strong arms as he would have taken an infant, and started to bear her from the room, but two of the elder ladies interfered and begged that she might be given up to them. It was only a swoon, and they knew just what to do.

After a moment's hesitation, Antonio gave her up, but said he should quickly follow.

"Oh!" he groaned, turning to his brother, who at that moment came up, "it was cruel, cruel! Only her great sympathy made her faint."

"Wait, wait," returned Steffano, with a look of malignant triumph. "As soon as her senses return you ask her. Don't wait for her to reflect and reason on it, but strike while the truth is on the surface. Will you do that?"

"Yes! and you shall find how deeply you have wronged her."

"If I do find that, all I have to say is, no one living will be more thankful than shall I."

Immediately afterward the duke followed the women who had borne his ward away.

Well, young gentleman," said the marquis, meeting the gaze of Henri Vavallia and Paulo Alavado fixed upon him with an expression of unmistakable horror. "What have you to say about it? You appear to be deeply interested."

They had stood close by, and had overheard every word which had been spoken by the duke and his brother, and they had caught the tones also. They had marked the deep pain and regret of Antonio, and the malevolence and triumph of Steffano, and it had struck them both at the same instant that the whole thing had been a cruel trick upon the princess to expose her affection for Zanoni. They remembered the scene on the river's bank, and that helped them to an understanding of the present business.

"Perhaps you were admirers of the painter?" added the marquis contemptuously, when he found that they did not answer him.

"I, for one, admired him very much," said Henri, with a stern, proud look into the eye of the man he addressed.

"So did I," added Paulo. "And I deem him worthy the admiration and respect of all true men."

"Do you mean to insinuate that I am not a true man?" demanded the marquis, angrily.

"Marquis," replied the youth, with a calm, manly look on his handsome face, "remember that we are beneath your brother's roof—his guests. You can not pick a quarrel with us."

And with this the pair of them turned away, and shortly afterward left the palace. Steffano glared after them, really too mad, too full of wrath, to speak. Something told him that they saw through the deception that had been practiced, and he only wondered if they suspected more.

Meantime the princess had been conveyed to another apartment, and laid upon a large sofa, where proper restorative treatment soon brought her back to consciousness. She looked up and met the anxious, loving gaze of her guardian, but before she could speak he made a sign enjoining her to silence.

As soon as the duke saw that she had fully recovered, he thanked those who had been helpful, and asked them to retire. There was a little hesitation on the part of one of the ladies, who was probably moved more by curiosity than sympathy, but her companion took her by the arm and soon led her away. When himself and his ward had been left alone together the duke closed the door and turned the key in the lock. Then he came back and sat down by the side of the sofa, on which the princess still reclined.

"Oh, dear Duke!" she cried, reaching forth her hand and grasping his wrist. "What was it Steffano said? Tell me—tell me—what has befallen—Zanoni?"

"Dear child," returned Antonio kindly, but with an earnest, searching look into the pale, wan face, "if the painting of the picture should be stopped, would it give you great disappointment?"

"Oh, guardian! what do you mean? What has happened? Speak! Tell me! You are torturing me with suspense."

"Isabel," he said, tenderly, yet with a great pain shadowed on his face, at the same time taking her hand, "what was this man to you? Tell me." His voice quivered, and he experienced a sense of shame as he thought of the intentional deceit his language was meant to convey—his speaking of the man in the past tense.

And the blow struck home. "What was this man to you?" rang in her ears and sank to her heart.

"Oh, he is dead! dead! dead! My love! my hero! Yes, I loved him! I loved him! He was all the world to me! My all of life, of love, and of joy!"

Then with a sharp, wild cry, she started to her feet and caught her guardian by the arm, glaring at him with a fierce, flaming fire in her eyes.

"Oh, Steffano has killed him! Steffano has killed him! Is it not so?"

"Isabel! What in the name of wonder are you thinking of? Steffano kill him! How could such a ridiculous fancy enter your mind?"

"Oh, not so ridiculous as you think!" she retorted, growing stronger under the influence of her wrathful feelings toward the marquis. "Did you know that he attacked Zanoni yesterday and drew his sword against him, and that Henri Vavallia and Paulo Alavado helped Count Denaro to drag him away?"

"Isabel! What are you telling me? Who told you that story?"

"Himself, Juan Zanoni. And this evening Henri and Paulo told it again, and they painted the wickedness of the deed blacker than did he. Oh, Steffano hated him with a deadly hatred. But I care not now. Only tell me, did he, Steffano, do it?"

"Isabel, my child, oh, pardon me! Zanoni is not dead. He is not even hurt. It was a plot to discover if you loved the plebeian painter. Oh, my soul! my soul! How shall I get over this? What can I say? What can I do?"

He would have spoken further, but the princess, as soon as she could comprehend the situation, had given utterance to a burst of thankfulness and sank back upon the sofa, seeming, for the moment, about to faint again. But she did not utterly sink, though she was terribly shaken.

As for the duke, his condition of mind was by no means a happy one. What to do, what to say, he scarcely knew. Should he wait until the princess had become stronger? He arose from his seat and took a turn across the room. He came back, paused a few seconds, and then crossed to and fro again, and this he repeated thrice. Then he resumed his seat and took the girl's hand. He had a duty to perform, and he would perform it, let the cost be what it might. Yet his heart was not in the work. The events of his childhood, and even those of his youth and early manhood, deserved to make him tender and lenient toward those below him in rank, with a disposition to take men for what they were worth rather than for the accident of their birth. He could not forget that the enemies of his house—of his father and his mother—had been all, every one of them, of the patrician order, while those who had proved friends, staneh and true, had been plebeian almost to a man. It had been the people against a class. Aye, and at the present moment he knew that the people of Parma were his friends. They loved and blessed him. Had there been as large a proportion of the plebeian class false to him at heart as he knew there was of the nobles, he would have felt his scepter insecure.

Again, he had come to love the handsome, pure-minded painter. Take them man against man, and Zanoni stood to Count Denaro as Hyperion to a satyr! As a husband for Isabel de Varona, had he been but noble, he had never known the man to whom he would rather give her than to Juan Zanoni. But that could not be.

"Isabel," he said, with a rich moisture in his eye and a sympathetic quiver in his voice, at the same time taking one of her hands in a warm, paternal grasp, "I must say to you a few words before we separate. I have only myself to blame for what has happened. I should have thought of many things that I suffered to escape me. I ought to have remembered Zanoni's beauty, his grand character, his surpassing intellect, and, above all else, his magnetic presence.

"Then, too, I should have remembered your orphaned childhood, your great capacity for love, your yearning for friendship, and the years you have passed with no heart all your own save only mine, and I, with my cares of state, have left you well-nigh to yourself. Ah! I should have thought of this when I sent you to Zanoni's studio—into his companionship.

"But, Isabel, you must be brave. You must remember the rank you hold, the character you bear. In one sense you are my representative—the representative of our ducal house. Were you to unite yourself with a plebeian the result would be a shock to our whole social system. And you could not marry here. Our laws would prevent it. You would be obliged to flee, and I need not tell you what a calamity that would be. Isabel, you will give it up. If there must be a sacrifice I believe you are equal to it. I would bear it if I could, but that may not be. The ordeal must be your own—the victory yours—and, in the time to come, the reward will be yours."

He paused here, but the girl made no response. She sat with folded hands, her head bowed, her bosom heaving, and ever and anon a sigh—a moan of anguish—burst from her lips. By-and-by the duke spoke again:

"Isabel, what more can I say? I can only once more implore you to tear this love from your heart—"

As those word fell upon her ears a convlusive shudder shook her from head to foot, and a cry of sharpest agony burst from her lips.

"Oh, my lord! my father—for I know you love me well—you ask me to kill myself! I can not! Oh, I can not! When you can tear from your heart the love and reverence you feel for the ill-fated, martyr mother who gave you life and being—when you can tear out that and cast it from you, forever a thing forgotten—then—then can I tear from my heart the love I feel for Juan Zanoni! Hush! Blame not him! Shall I tell you how I came to know he loved me?" He bade me that I should tell you that he could not finish the picture. I was to tell you that you were to send me no more to sit, for he could not—he would not—work on it more.

Duke, it was then, when he had told me to come to him no more, that I knew how I loved him! In that hour—at that moment—I knew that my heart had gone out to him, to be his forevermore! You can imagine the rest. I saw he loved me, and I made him speak. I was patrician, he plebeian. I took the lead, and our love was told. Oh, my love! my life!

"But let us say no more now. Let me think. It has all come upon me so suddenly that I can not speak coherently. Will you let me have time? Not time in which to give up my love; but to think how I may regulate my life and save it. You will spare me for the present, I know."

She could not have asked of him another favor which he would have granted so readily.

(To be Continued.)

PERSONAL POINTERS.

Notes of Interest About Some of the Great People of the World.

Prof. von Zenker, who in 1860 first discovered the trichina disease, died recently in Mecklenburg at the age of 73 years.

Prof. Baron, of Bonn, who drew up the German Civil Code and was a well known lecturer on the Pandects, is dead.

Mr. John Morley states that the rumour that he has joined the Roman Catholic Church is absolutely without foundation.

Antonin Mercir, the sculptor, has applied for a divorce from his wife on the curious ground that she has left him to become a nun.

Pope Leo XIII. walking in the gardens of the Vatican, will soon be a living picture attraction, as his photograph has just been taken for the cinematograph.

Queen Wilhelmine of the Netherlands has dismissed her last teacher, and will take a vacation before entering on the business of reigning at the end of August.

Queen Victoria came near losing her old wooden yacht, the Victoria and Albert recently. Fire caught in the forecastle, but was put out by hard work on the part of the crew.

Siam's royal family having brought bicycles with it from Europe, every noble of Siam is trying to ride a wheel. Great improvements in the roads of the country are looked for in consequence.

Duke Adolf Friedrich of Mecklenburg Schwerin, an uncle of the Grand Duke, who won an army steeplechase at Berlin recently, is the first Prince of a reigning house to ride in a horse race in Germany.

Lord Charles Beresford is bound that Parliament shall know something about the navy. He took 200 members of the House of Commons to Portsmouth on a special train and made them inspect the dock yards, acting as guide himself.

Shelley's guitar, presented to Mrs. Williams with his poem, "To a Lady, with a Guitar," has been given to the Bodleian Library at Oxford, by an American admirer of Shelley, who bought it from the Williams family for the purpose.

Prince Ahmed Seif Eddin's recent murderous attack on his brother-in-law Fuad Pasha, at the Cairo Khedivial Club, has led to a curious suit. The club demands damages from the Prince for the harm done to the club's reputation by the row.

Sergeant Matthews of the Civil Service Volunteer Rifles has made a world's record of 105, all bull's-eyes, shooting from the knee, under the Queen's first stage conditions of seven shots each at 200, 500 and 600 yards, in a recent regimental competition.

Princess Alice of Albany, now 16, has developed the fondness for art common to the women of the English royal family, and is providing her relatives with sketches made by herself. She has sent one also to the young Queen of Holland as a coronation present.

If Viscount Wolseley is sent to Canada as Governor General, it is believed that Queen Victoria's son, the Duke of Connaught, will be made Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, a place he is likely to retain permanently, like the Duke of Cambridge before him.

John Henry Cromwell Russell, sixth in direct descent from the Lord Protector, has died in Switzerland at the age of 92 years. His grandfather was Oliver Cromwel lof Cheshunt Park great-grandson of Oliver's son Henry, and the last of the family who bore the name of Cromwell.

Mme. Chenay, aged 80, has obtained a judicial separation from M. Chenay, engraver, aged 85. She was the sister of Mme. Victor Hugo, and acted as the poet's secretary at Guernsey. She had lived apart from her husband for over thirty years. When the case came up a year ago the Judge put it off to try if persons of their age could make up their differences.

Princess Helene of Aosta is soon to become a mother, according to reports from Turin. The child, if a boy, stands a good chance of succeeding to the throne of Italy, as the Prince of Naples has no children as yet. The Duke and Duchess of Aosta came near separating some time ago, owing to the Duchess's indignation at the Prince of Naples's marriage, which interposed an unexpected barrier between her and the Italian throne, for the sake of which she married the Duke.

All the Monmouthshire estates of the Beaufort family, comprising 26,000 acres with a yearly rent roll of $150,000, are offered for sale by the Duke's eldest son, the Marquis of Worcester. Included in the sale are eight castles, among them Monmouth, where Henry V. was born; Usk, where Edward IV. and Richard III. were born; Chepstow, Raglan, Striguil, and Grosmont, besides the ruins of Tintern Abbey and the manorial rights over King Arthur's Caerleon. Before the crash in wheat it was stated that Mr. L. Z. Leiter would purchase Tintern Abbey.

More trouble has arisen from the ill-omened marriage of the Princess Dorothea of Saxe-Coburg with the Kaiser's brother-in-law, Duke Ernest Gunther of Schleswig-Holstein, now set for Agu. 2. The wedding will take place in the Catholic church at Coburg. The announcement has called attention from the wretched scandals of which the Princess's mother is the heroine to the fact that the Princess herself is a Catholic and has aroused Protestant sentiment in Germany against her marriage to a Protestant Prince, as it is assumed that a dispensation could only have been granted on the usual condition that the children must be brought up in the Catholic faith.

A Carpenter's Story.

STRICKEN WITH LA GRIPPE, FOLLOWED BY RHEUMATISM.

Suffered a Great Deal and for Two Months Was Unable to Work — Dr. Williams' Pink Pills Restored His Health.

From the Reporter, Palmerston, Ont.

There is not a better known man in Palmerston, than Mr. Jas. Skea, who for the past twenty-four years has followed the trade of carpentry in the town. Mr. Skea, who is a native of the Orkney Islands, is now sixty-six years of age and is hale and hearty. A few years ago he was attacked with grip, which left in its wake acute rheumatism. For two months he was unable to work and suffered a great deal from this dread disease. He used several kinds of liniments, but to no avail. Having read in the papers of the wonderful cures effected by Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People he decided to try them. He took one box and was surprised at the effect. He took a second and finally a third, when he found that his old enemy was about routed. To a Reporter representative, who called upon him at his residence to find out if the reported cure was correct, Mr. Skea said: "I was greatly surprised at the result of taking a couple of boxes. I suffered fearfully, but they made a new man of me, and fixed me right up. I now take them every spring and fall to guard against colds and grip. They are the only thing that does me any good. Mr. Campbell or Mr. Thom will tell you that I wouldn't be without Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for anything. They are the best medicine in the world. Though I am up in years, my health is good and I am right as a dollar. I attribute it to the use of these Pills. I recommended them to Mr. William Beattie, carpenter foreman on the G. N. W., who had also been troubled with rheumatism and they speedily effected a cure in his case."

Dr. Williams' Pink Pills cure by going to the root of the disease. They renew and build up the blood, and strengthen the nerves, thus driving disease from the system. Avoid imitations by insisting that every box you purchase is enclosed in a wrapping bearing the full trade mark, "Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People."

INSINUATING CREDULITY.

Do you say this is a canvas-back duck, madam?

I did. Do you doubt my word?

No, madam. I wouldn't have doubted your word had you said it was a leather-back duck.