

SANDRA BELLONI

By

George Meredith

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***Free*editorial** 

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CHAPTER I

We are to make acquaintance with some serious damsels, as this English generation knows them, and at a season verging upon May. The ladies of Brookfield, Arabella, Cornelia, and Adela Pole, daughters of a flourishing City-of-London merchant, had been told of a singular thing: that in the neighbouring fir-wood a voice was to be heard by night, so wonderfully sweet and richly toned, that it required their strong sense to correct strange imaginings concerning it. Adela was herself the chief witness to its unearthly sweetness, and her testimony was confirmed by Edward Buxley, whose ear had likewise taken in the notes, though not on the same night, as the pair publicly proved by dates. Both declared that the voice belonged to an opera-singer or a spirit. The ladies of Brookfield, declining the alternative, perceived that this was a surprise furnished for their amusement by the latest celebrity of their circle, Mr. Pericles, their father's business ally and fellow-speculator; Mr. Pericles, the Greek, the man who held millions of money as dust compared to a human voice. Fortified by this exquisite supposition, their strong sense at once dismissed with scorn the idea of anything unearthly, however divine, being heard at night, in the nineteenth century, within sixteen miles of London City. They agreed that Mr. Pericles had hired some charming cantatrice to draw them into the woods and delightfully bewilder them. It was to be expected of his princely nature, they said. The Tinleys, of Bloxholme, worshipped him for his wealth; the ladies of Brookfield assured their friends that the fact of his being a money-maker was redeemed in their sight by his devotion to music. Music was now the Art in the ascendant at Brookfield. The ladies (for it is as well to know at once that they were not of that poor order of women who yield their admiration to a thing for its abstract virtue only)—the ladies were scaling society by the help of the Arts. To this laudable end sacrifices were now made to Euterpe to assist them. As mere daughters of a merchant, they were compelled to make their house not simply attractive, but enticing; and, seeing that they liked music, it seemed a very agreeable device. The Tinleys of Bloxholme still kept to dancing, and had effectually driven away Mr. Pericles from their gatherings. For Mr. Pericles said: "If that they will go 'so,' I will be amused." He presented a top-like triangular appearance for one staggering second. The Tinleys did not go 'so' at all, and consequently they lost the satirical man, and were called 'the ballet-dancers' by Adela which thorny scoff her sisters permitted to pass about for a single day, and no more. The Tinleys were their match at epithets, and any low contention of this kind obscured for them the social summit they hoped to attain; the dream whereof was their prime nourishment.

That the Tinleys really were their match, they acknowledged, upon the admission of the despicable nature of the game. The Tinleys had winged a dreadful shaft at them; not in itself to be dreaded, but that it struck a weak point; it was a common shot that exploded a magazine; and for a time it quite upset their social policy, causing them to act like simple young ladies who feel things and resent them. The ladies of Brookfield had let it be known that, in their privacy together, they were Pole, Polar, and North Pole. Pole, Polar, and North Pole were designations of the three shades of distance which they could convey in a bow: a form of salute they cherished as peculiarly their own; being a method they had invented to rebuke the intrusiveness of the outer world, and hold away all strangers until approved worthy. Even friends had occasionally to submit to it in a softened form. Arabella, the eldest, and Adela, the youngest, alternated Pole and Polar; but North Pole was shared by Cornelia with none. She was the fairest of the three; a nobly-built person; her eyes not vacant of tenderness when she put off her armour. In her war-

panoply before unhappy strangers, she was a Britomart. They bowed to an iceberg, which replied to them with the freezing indifference of the floating colossus, when the Winter sun despatches a feeble greeting messenger-beam from his miserable Arctic wallet. The simile must be accepted in its might, for no lesser one will express the scornfulness toward men displayed by this strikingly well-favoured, formal lady, whose heart of hearts demanded for her as spouse, a lord, a philosopher, and a Christian, in one: and he must be a member of Parliament. Hence her isolated air.

Now, when the ladies of Brookfield heard that their Pole, Polar, and North Pole, the splendid image of themselves, had been transformed by the Tinleys, and defiled by them to Pole, Polony, and Maypole, they should have laughed contemptuously; but the terrible nerve of ridicule quivered in witness against them, and was not to be stilled. They could not understand why so coarse a thing should affect them. It stuck in their flesh. It gave them the idea that they saw their features hideous, but real, in a magnifying mirror.

There was therefore a feud between the Tinleys and the Poles; and when Mr. Pericles entirely gave up the former, the latter rewarded him by spreading abroad every possible kind interpretation of his atrocious bad manners. He was a Greek, of Parisian gilding, whose Parisian hat flew off at a moment's notice, and whose savage snarl was heard at the slightest vexation. His talk of renowned prime-donne by their Christian names, and the way that he would catalogue emperors, statesmen, and noblemen known to him, with familiar indifference, as things below the musical Art, gave a distinguishing tone to Brookfield, from which his French accentuation of our tongue did not detract.

Mr. Pericles grimaced bitterly at any claim to excellence being set up for the mysterious voice in the woods. Tapping one forefinger on the uplifted point of the other, he observed that to sing abroad in the night air of an English Spring month was conclusive of imbecility; and that no imbecile sang at all. Because, to sing, involved the highest accomplishment of which the human spirit could boast. Did the ladies see? he asked. They thought they saw that he carried on a deception admirably. In return, they inquired whether he would come with them and hunt the voice, saying that they would catch it for him. "I shall catch a cold for myself," said Mr. Pericles, from the elevation of a shrug, feeling that he was doomed to go forth. He acted reluctance so well that the ladies affected a pretty imperiousness; and when at last he consented to join the party, they thanked him with a nicely simulated warmth, believing that they had pleased him thoroughly.

Their brother Wilfrid was at Brookfield. Six months earlier he had returned from India, an invalided cornet of light cavalry, with a reputation for military dash and the prospect of a medal. Then he was their heroic brother he was now their guard. They love him tenderly, and admired him when it was necessary; but they had exhausted their own sensations concerning his deeds of arms, and fancied that he had served their purpose. And besides, valour is not an intellectual quality, they said. They were ladies so aspiring, these daughters of the merchant Samuel Bolton Pole, that, if Napoleon had been their brother, their imaginations would have overtopped him after his six months' inaction in the Tuileries. They would by that time have made a stepping-stone of the emperor. 'Mounting' was the title given to this proceeding. They went on perpetually mounting. It is still a good way from the head of the tallest of men to the stars; so they had their

work before them; but, as they observed, they were young. To be brief, they were very ambitious damsels, aiming at they knew not exactly what, save that it was something so wide that it had not a name, and so high in the air that no one could see it. They knew assuredly that their circle did not please them. So, therefore, they were constantly extending and refining it: extending it perhaps for the purpose of refining it. Their susceptibilities demanded that they should escape from a city circle. Having no mother, they ruled their father's house and him, and were at least commanders of whatsoever forces they could summon for the task.

It may be seen that they were sentimentalists. That is to say, they supposed that they enjoyed exclusive possession of the Nice Feelings, and exclusively comprehended the Fine Shades. Whereof more will be said; but in the meantime it will explain their propensity to mount; it will account for their irritation at the material obstructions surrounding them; and possibly the philosopher will now have his eye on the source of that extraordinary sense of superiority to mankind which was the crown of their complacent brows. Eclipsed as they may be in the gross appreciation of the world by other people, who excel in this and that accomplishment, persons that nourish Nice Feelings and are intimate with the Fine Shades carry their own test of intrinsic value.

Nor let the philosopher venture hastily to despise them as pipers to dilettante life. Such persons come to us in the order of civilization. In their way they help to civilize us. Sentimentalists are a perfectly natural growth of a fat soil. Wealthy communities must engender them. If with attentive minds we mark the origin of classes, we shall discern that the Nice Feelings and the Fine Shades play a principal part in our human development and social history. I dare not say that civilized man is to be studied with the eye of a naturalist; but my vulgar meaning might almost be twisted to convey: that our sentimentalists are a variety owing their existence to a certain prolonged term of comfortable feeding. The pig, it will be retorted, passes likewise through this training. He does. But in him it is not combined with an indigestion of high German romances. Here is so notable a difference, that he cannot possibly be said to be of the family. And I maintain it against him, who have nevertheless listened attentively to the eulogies pronounced by the vendors of prize bacon.

After thus stating to you the vast pretensions of the ladies of Brookfield, it would be unfair to sketch their portraits. Nothing but comedy bordering on burlesque could issue from the contrast, though they graced a drawing-room or a pew, and had properly elegant habits and taste in dress, and were all fair to the sight. Moreover, Adela had not long quitted school. Outwardly they were not unlike other young ladies with wits alert. They were at the commencement of their labours on this night of the expedition when they were fated to meet something greatly confusing them.

CHAPTER II

Half of a rosy mounting full moon was on the verge of the East as the ladies, with attendant cavaliers, passed, humming softly, through the garden-gates. Arabella had, by right of birth, made claim to Mr. Pericles: not without an unwontedly fretful remonstrance from Cornelia, who said, "My dear, you must allow that I have some talent for drawing men out."

And Arabella replied: "Certainly, dear, you have; and I think I have some too."

The gentle altercation lasted half-an-hour, but they got no farther than this. Mr. Pericles was either hopeless of protecting himself from such shrewd assailants, or indifferent to their attacks, for all his defensive measures were against the cold. He was muffled in a superbly mounted bearskin, which came up so closely about his ears that Arabella had to repeat to him all her questions, and as it were force a way for her voice through the hide. This was provoking, since it not only stemmed the natural flow of conversation, but prevented her imagination from decorating the reminiscence of it subsequently (which was her profound secret pleasure), besides letting in the outer world upon her. Take it as an axiom, when you utter a sentimentalism, that more than one pair of ears makes a cynical critic. A sentimentalism requires secrecy. I can enjoy it, and shall treat it respectfully if you will confide it to me alone; but I and my friends must laugh at it outright.

"Does there not seem a soul in the moonlight?" for instance. Arabella, after a rapturous glance at the rosy orb, put it to Mr. Pericles, in subdued impressive tones. She had to repeat her phrase; Mr. Pericles then echoing, with provoking monotony of tone, "Sol?"—whereupon "Soul!" was reiterated, somewhat sharply; and Mr. Pericles, peering over the collar of the bear, with half an eye, continued the sentence, in the manner of one sent thereby farther from its meaning: "Ze moonlight?" Despairing and exasperated, Arabella commenced afresh: "I said, there seems a soul in it"; and Mr. Pericles assented bluntly: "In ze light!"—which sounded so little satisfactory that Arabella explained, "I mean the aspect;" and having said three times distinctly what she meant, in answer to a terrific glare from the unsubmerged whites of the eyes of Mr. Pericles, this was his comment, almost roared forth:

"Sol! you say so-whole—in ze moonlight—Luna? Hein? Ze aspect is of Sol!—Yez."

And Mr. Pericles sank into his bear again, while Wilfrid Pole, who was swinging his long cavalry legs to rearward, shouted; and Mr. Sumner, a rising young barrister, walking beside Cornelia, smiled a smile of extreme rigidity. Arabella was punished for claiming rights of birth. She heard the murmuring course of the dialogue between Cornelia and Mr. Sumner, sufficiently clear to tell her it was not fictitious and was well sustained, while her heart was kept thirsting for the key to it. In advance were Adela and Edward Buxley, who was only a rich alderman's only son, but had the virtue of an extraordinary power of drawing caricatures, and was therefore useful in exaggerating the features of disagreeable people, and showing how odious they were: besides endearing pleasant ones exhibiting how comic they could be. Gossips averred that before Mr. Pole had been worried by his daughters into giving that mighty sum for Brookfield, Arabella had accepted Edward as her suitor; but for some reason or other he had apparently fallen from his high estate. To tell the truth, Arabella conceived that he had simply obeyed her wishes, while he knew he was naughtily following his own; and Adela, without introspection at all, was

making her virgin effort at the caricaturing of our sex in his person: an art for which she promised well.

Out of the long black shadows of the solitary trees of the park, and through low yellow moonlight, they passed suddenly into the muffled ways of the wood. Mr. Pericles was ineffably provoking. He had come for gallantry's sake, and was not to be rallied, and would echo every question in a roar, and there was no drawing of the man out at all. He knocked against branches, and tripped over stumps, and ejaculated with energy; but though he gave no heed or help to his fair associate, she thought not the worse of him, so heroic can women be toward any creature that will permit himself to be clothed by a mystery. At times the party hung still, fancying the voice aloft, and then, after listening to the unrelieved stillness, they laughed, and trod the stiff dry ferns and soft mosses once more. At last they came to a decided halt, when the proposition to return caused Adela to come up to Mr. Pericles and say to him, "Now, you must confess! You have prohibited her from singing to-night so that we may continue to be mystified. I call this quite shameful of you!"

And even as Mr. Pericles was protesting that he was the most mystified of the company, his neck lengthened, and his head went round, and his ear was turned to the sky, while he breathed an elaborate "Ah!" And sure enough that was the voice of the woods, cleaving the night air, not distant. A sleepy fire of early moonlight hung through the dusky fir-branches. The voice had the woods to itself, and seemed to fill them and soar over them, it was so full and rich, so light and sweet. And now, to add to the marvel, they heard a harp accompaniment, the strings being faintly touched, but with firm fingers. A woman's voice: on that could be no dispute. Tell me, what opens heaven more flamingly to heart and mind, than the voice of a woman, pouring clear accordant notes to the blue night sky, that grows light blue to the moon? There was no flourish in her singing. All the notes were firm, and rounded, and sovereignly distinct. She seemed to have caught the ear of Night, and sang confident of her charm. It was a grand old Italian air, requiring severity of tone and power. Now into great mournful hollows the voice sank steadfastly. One soft sweep of the strings succeeded a deep final note, and the hearers breathed freely.

"Stradella!" said the Greek, folding his arms.

The ladies were too deeply impressed to pursue their play with him. Real emotions at once set aside the semi-credence they had given to their own suggestions.

"Hush! she will sing again," whispered Adela. "It is the most delicious contralto." Murmurs of objection to the voice being characterized at all by any technical word, or even for a human quality, were heard.

"Let me find zis woman!" cried the prose enthusiast Mr. Pericles, imperiously, with his bearskin thrown back on his shoulders, and forth they stepped, following him.

In the middle of the wood there was a sandy mound, rising half the height of the lesser firs, bounded by a green-grown vallum, where once an old woman, hopelessly a witch, had squatted, and defied the authorities to make her budge: nor could they accomplish the task before her witch-soul had taken wing in the form of a black night-bird, often to be heard jarring above the

spot. Lank dry weeds and nettles, and great lumps of green and gray moss, now stood on the poor old creature's place of habitation, and the moon, slanting through the fir-clumps, was scattered on the blossoms of twisted orchard-trees, gone wild again. Amid this desolation, a dwarfed pine, whose roots were partially bared as they grasped the broken bank that was its perch, threw far out a cedar-like hand. In the shadow of it sat the fair singer. A musing touch of her harp-strings drew the intruders to the charmed circle, though they could discern nothing save the glimmer of the instrument and one set of fingers caressing it. How she viewed their rather impertinent advance toward her, till they had ranged in a half-circle nearer and nearer, could not be guessed. She did not seem abashed in any way, for, having preluded, she threw herself into another song.

The charm was now more human, though scarcely less powerful. This was a different song from the last: it was not the sculptured music of the old school, but had the richness and fulness of passionate blood that marks the modern Italian, where there is much dallying with beauty in the thick of sweet anguish. Here, at a certain passage of the song, she gathered herself up and pitched a nervous note, so shrewdly triumphing, that, as her voice sank to rest, her hearers could not restrain a deep murmur of admiration.

Then came an awkward moment. The ladies did not wish to go, and they were not justified in stopping. They were anxious to speak, and they could not choose the word to utter. Mr. Pericles relieved them by moving forward and doffing his hat, at the same time begging excuse for the rudeness they were guilty of.

The fair singer answered, with the quickness that showed a girl: "Oh, stay; do stay, if I please you!" A singular form of speech, it was thought by the ladies.

She added: "I feel that I sing better when I have people to listen to me."

"You find it more sympathetic, do you not?" remarked Cornelia.

"I don't know," responded the unknown, with a very honest smile. "I like it."

She was evidently uneducated. "A professional?" whispered Adela to Arabella. She wanted little invitation to exhibit her skill, at all events, for, at a word, the clear, bold, but finely nervous voice, was pealing to a brisker measure, that would have been joyous but for one fall it had, coming unexpectedly, without harshness, and winding up the song in a ringing melancholy.

After a few bars had been sung, Mr. Pericles was seen tapping his forehead perplexedly. The moment it ended, he cried out, in a tone of vexed apology for strange ignorance: "But I know not it? It is Italian—yes, I swear it is Italian! But—who then? It is superbe! But I know not it!"

"It is mine," said the young person.

"Your music, miss?"

"I mean, I composed it."

"Permit me to say, Brava!"

The ladies instantly petitioned to have it sung to them again; and whether or not they thought more of it, or less, now that the authorship was known to them, they were louder in their applause, which seemed to make the little person very happy.

"You are sure it pleases you?" she exclaimed.

They were very sure it pleased them. Somehow the ladies were growing gracious toward her, from having previously felt too humble, it may be. She was girlish in her manner, and not imposing in her figure. She would be a sweet mystery to talk about, they thought: but she had ceased to be quite the same mystery to them.

"I would go on singing to you," she said; "I could sing all night long: but my people at the farm will not keep supper for me, when it's late, and I shall have to go hungry to bed, if I wait."

"Have you far to go?" ventured Adela.

"Only to Wilson's farm; about ten minutes' walk through the wood," she answered unhesitatingly.

Arabella wished to know whether she came frequently to this lovely spot.

"When it does not rain, every evening," was the reply.

"You feel that the place inspires you?" said Cornelia.

"I am obliged to come," she explained. "The good old dame at the farm is ill, and she says that music all day is enough for her, and I must come here, or I should get no chance of playing at all at night."

"But surely you feel an inspiration in the place, do you not?" Cornelia persisted.

She looked at this lady as if she had got a hard word given her to crack, and muttered: "I feel it quite warm here. And I do begin to love the place."

The stately Cornelia fell back a step.

The moon was now a silver ball on the edge of the circle of grey blue above the ring of firs, and by the light falling on the strange little person, as she stood out of the shadow to muffle up her harp, it could be seen that she was simply clad, and that her bonnet was not of the newest fashion. The sisters remarked a boot-lace hanging loose. The peculiar black lustre of her hair, and thickness of her long black eyebrows, struck them likewise. Her harp being now comfortably mantled, Cornet Wilfrid Pole, who had been watching her and balancing repeatedly on his forward foot, made a stride, and "really could not allow her to carry it herself," and begged her permission that he might assist her. "It's very heavy, you know," he added.

"Too heavy for me," she said, favouring him with a thankful smile. "I have some one who does that. Where is Jim?"

She called for Jim, and from the back of the sandy hillock, where he had been reclining, a broad-shouldered rustic came lurching round to them.

"Now, take my harp, if you please, and be as careful as possible of branches, and don't stumble." She uttered this as if she were giving Jim his evening lesson: and then with a sudden cry she laughed out: "Oh! but I haven't played you your tune, and you must have your tune!"

Forthwith she stript the harp half bare, and throwing a propitiatory bright glance at her audience on the other side of her, she commenced thrumming a kind of Giles Scroggins, native British, beer-begotten air, while Jim smeared his mouth and grinned, as one who sees his love dragged into public view, and is not the man to be ashamed of her, though he hopes you will hardly put him to the trial.

"This is his favourite tune, that he taught me," she emphasized to the company. "I play to him every night, for a finish; and then he takes care not to knock my poor harp to pieces and tumble about."

The gentlemen were amused by the Giles Scroggins air, which she had delivered with a sufficient sense of its lumping fun and leg-for-leg jollity, and they laughed and applauded; but the ladies were silent after the performance, until the moment came to thank her for the entertainment she had afforded them: and then they broke into gentle smiles, and trusted they might have the pleasure of hearing her another night.

"Oh! just as often and as much as you like," she said, and first held her hand to Arabella, next to Cornelia, and then to Adela. She seemed to be hesitating before the gentlemen, and when Wilfrid raised his hat, she was put to some confusion, and bowed rather awkwardly, and retired.

"Good night, miss!" called Mr. Pericles.

"Good night, sir!" she answered from a little distance, and they could see that she was there emboldened to drop a proper curtsy in accompaniment.

Then the ladies stood together and talked of her, not with absolute enthusiasm. For, "Was it not divine?" said Adela; and Cornelia asked her if she meant the last piece; and, "Oh, gracious! not that!" Adela exclaimed. And then it was discovered how their common observation had fastened on the boot-lace; and this vagrant article became the key to certain speculations on her condition and character.

"I wish I'd had a dozen bouquets, that's all!" cried Wilfrid, "she deserved them."

"Has she sentiment for what she sings? or is it only faculty?" Cornelia put it to Mr. Sumner.

That gentleman faintly defended the stranger for the intrusion of the bumpkin tune. "She did it so well!" he said.

"I complain that she did it too well," uttered Cornelia, whose use of emphasis customarily implied that the argument remained with her.

Talking in this manner, and leisurely marching homeward, they were startled to hear Mr. Pericles, who had wrapped himself impenetrably in the bear, burst from his cogitation suddenly to cry out, in his harshest foreign accent: "Yeaz!" And thereupon he threw open the folds, and laid out a forefinger, and delivered himself: "I am made my mind! I send her abroad to ze Academie for one, two, tree year. She shall be instructed as was not before. Zen a noise at La Scala. No—Paris! No—London! She shall astonish London fairst.—Yez! if I take a theatre! Yez! if I buy a newspaper! Yez! if I pay feefty-sossand pound!"

His singular outlandish vehemence, and the sweeping grandeur of a determination that lightly assumed the corruptibility of our Press, sent a smile circling among the ladies and gentlemen. The youth who had wished to throw the fair unknown a dozen bouquets, caught himself frowning at this brilliant prospect for her, which was to give him his opportunity.

CHAPTER III

The next morning there were many "tra-las" and "tum-te-turns" over the family breakfast-table; a constant humming and crying, "I have it"; and after two or three bars, baffled pauses and confusion of mind. Mr. Pericles was almost abusive at the impotent efforts of the sisters to revive in his memory that particular delicious melody, the composition of the fair singer herself. At last he grew so impatient as to arrest their opening notes, and even to interrupt their unmusical consultations, with "No: it is no use; it is no use: no, no, I say!" But instantly he would plunge his forehead into the palm of his hand, and rub it red, and work his eyebrows frightfully, until tender humanity led the sisters to resume. Adela's, "I'm sure it began low down—tum!" Cornelia's: "The key-note, I am positive, was B flat—ta!" and Arabella's putting of these two assertions together, and promise to combine them at the piano when breakfast was at an end, though it was Sunday morning, were exasperating to the exquisite lover of music. Mr. Pericles was really suffering torments. Do you know what it is to pursue the sylph, and touch her flying skirts, think you have caught her, and are sure of her—that she is yours, the rapturous evanescent darling! when some well-meaning earthly wretch interposes and trips you, and off she flies and leaves you floundering? A lovely melody nearly grasped and lost in this fashion, tries the temper. Apollo chasing Daphne could have been barely polite to the wood-nymphs in his path, and Mr. Pericles was rude to the daughters of his host. Smoothing his clean square chin and thick moustache hastily, with outspread thumb and fingers, he implored them to spare his nerves. Smiling rigidly, he trusted they would be merciful to a sensitive ear. Mr. Pole—who, as an

Englishman, could not understand anyone being so serious in the pursuit of a tune—laughed, and asked questions, and almost drove Mr. Pericles mad. On a sudden the Greek's sallow visage lightened. "It is to you! it is to you!" he cried, stretching his finger at Wilfrid. The young officer, having apparently waited till he had finished with his knife and fork, was leaning his cheek on his fist, looking at nobody, and quietly humming a part of the air. Mr. Pericles complimented and thanked him.

"But you have ear for music extraordinaire!" he said.

Adela patted her brother fondly, remarking—"Yes, when his feelings are concerned."

"Will you repeat zat?" asked the Greek. "'To-to-ri:' hein? I lose it. 'To-to-ru:' bah! I lose it; 'To-ri:—to—ru—ri ro:' it is no use: I lose it."

Neither his persuasions, nor his sneer, "Because it is Sunday, perhaps!" would induce Wilfrid to be guilty of another attempt. The ladies tried sisterly cajoleries on him fruitlessly, until Mr. Pole, seeing the desperation of his guest, said: "Why not have her up here, toon and all, some week-day? Sunday birds won't suit us, you know. We've got a piano for her that's good enough for the first of 'em, if money means anything."

The ladies murmured meekly: "Yes, papa."

"I shall find her for you while you go to your charch," said Mr. Pericles. And here Wilfrid was seized with a yawn, and rose, and asked his eldest sister if she meant to attend the service that morning.

"Undoubtedly," she answered; and Mr. Pole took it up: "That's our discipline, my boy. Must set an example: do our duty. All the house goes to worship in the country."

"Why, in ze country?" queried Mr. Pericles.

"Because"—Cornelia came to the rescue of her sire; but her impetuosity was either unsupported by a reason, or she stooped to fit one to the comprehension of the interrogator: "Oh, because—do you know, we have very select music at our church?"

"We have a highly-paid organist," added Arabella.

"Recently elected," said Adela.

"Ah! mon Dieu!" Mr. Pericles ejaculated. "Some music sound well at afar—mellow, you say. I prefer your charch music mellow."

"Won't you come?" cried Wilfrid, with wonderful briskness.

"No. Mellow for me!"

The Greek's grinders flashed, and Wilfrid turned off from him sulkily. He saw in fancy the robber-Greek prowling about Wilson's farm, setting snares for the marvellous night-bird, and it was with more than his customary inattention to his sisters' refined conversation that he formed part of their male escort to the place of worship.

Mr. Pericles met the church-goers on their return in one of the green bowery lanes leading up to Brookfield. Cold as he was to English scenes and sentiments, his alien ideas were not unimpressed by the picture of those daintily-clad young women demurely stepping homeward, while the air held a revel of skylarks, and the scented hedgeways quickened with sunshine.

"You have missed a treat!" Arabella greeted him.

"A sermon?" said he.

The ladies would not tell him, until his complacent cynicism at the notion of his having missed a sermon, spurred them to reveal that the organ had been handled in a masterly manner; and that the voluntary played at the close of the service was most exquisite.

"Even papa was in raptures."

"Very good indeed," said Mr. Pole. "I'm no judge; but you might listen to that sort of playing after dinner."

Mr. Pericles seemed to think that was scarcely a critical period, but he merely grimaced, and inquired: "Did you see ze player?"

"Oh, no: they are hidden," Arabella explained to him, "behind a curtain."

"But, what!" shouted the impetuous Greek: "have you no curiosity? A woman! And zen, you saw not her?"

"No," remarked Cornelia, in the same aggravating sing-song voice of utter indifference: "we don't know whether it was not a man. Our usual organist is a man, I believe."

The eyes of the Greek whitened savagely, and he relapsed into frigid politeness.

Wilfrid was not present to point their apprehensions. He had loitered behind; but when he joined them in the house subsequently, he was cheerful, and had a look of triumph about him which made his sisters say, "So, you have been with the Copleys:" and he allowed them to suppose it, if they pleased; the Copleys being young ladies of position in the neighbourhood, of much higher standing than the Tinleys, who, though very wealthy, could not have given their brother such an air, the sisters imagined.

At lunch, Wilfrid remarked carelessly: "By the way, I met that little girl we saw last night."

"The singer! where?" asked his sisters, with one voice.

"Coming out of church."

"She goes to church, then!"

This exclamation showed the heathen they took her to be.

"Why, she played the organ," said Wilfrid.

"And how does she look by day? How does she dress?"

"Oh! very jolly little woman! Dresses quiet enough."

"She played the organ! It was she, then! An organist! Is there anything approaching to gentility in her appearance?"

"I—really I'm no judge," said Wilfrid. "You had better ask Laura Tinley. She was talking to her when I went up."

The sisters exchanged looks. Presently they stood together in consultation. Then they spoke with their aunt, Mrs. Lupin, and went to their papa. The rapacity of those Tinleys for anything extraordinary was known to them, but they would not have conceived that their own discovery, their own treasure, could have been caught up so quickly. If the Tinleys got possession of her, the defection of Mr. Pericles might be counted on, and the display of a phenomenon would be lost to them. They decided to go down to Wilson's farm that very day, and forestall their rivals by having her up to Brookfield. The idea of doing this had been in a corner of their minds all the morning: it seemed now the most sensible plan in the world. It was patronage, in its right sense. And they might be of great service to her, by giving a proper elevation and tone to her genius; while she might amuse them, and their guests, and be let off, in fact, as a firework for the nonce. Among the queenly cases of women who are designing to become the heads of a circle (if I may use the term), an accurate admeasurement of reciprocal advantages can scarcely be expected to rank; but the knowledge that an act, depending upon us for execution, is capable of benefiting both sides, will make the proceeding appear so unselfish, that its wisdom is overlooked as well as its motives. The sisters felt they were the patronesses of the little obscure genius whom they longed for to illumine their household, before they knew her name. Cornet Wilfrid Pole must have chuckled mightily to see them depart on their mission. These ladies, who managed everybody, had themselves been very cleverly managed. It is doubtful whether the scheme to surprise and delight Mr. Pericles would have actuated the step they took, but for the dread of seeing the rapacious Tinleys snatch up their lawful prey. The Tinleys were known to be quite capable of doing so. They had, on a particular occasion, made transparent overtures to a celebrity belonging to the Poles, whom they had first met at Brookfield: could never have hoped to have seen had they not met him at Brookfield; and girls who behaved in this way would do anything. The resolution was taken to steal a march on them; nor did it seem at all odd to people naturally so hospitable as the denizens of Brookfield, that the stranger of yesterday should be the guest of to-day. Kindness of heart, combined with a great scheme in the brain, easily put aside conventional rules.

"But we don't know her name," they said, when they had taken the advice of the gentlemen on what they had already decided to do: all excepting Mr. Pericles, for whom the surprise was in store.

"Belloni—Miss Belloni," said Wilfrid.

"Are you sure? How do you know—?"

"She told Laura Tinley."

Within five minutes of the receipt of this intelligence the ladies were on their way to Wilson's farm.

CHAPTER IV

The circle which the ladies of Brookfield were designing to establish just now, was of this receipt:—Celebrities, London residents, and County notables, all in their severally due proportions, were to meet, mix, and revolve: the Celebrities to shine; the Metropolitans to act as satellites; the County ignoramuses to feel flattered in knowing that all stood forth for their amusement: they being the butts of the quick-witted Metropolitans, whom they despised, while the sons of renown were encouraged to be conscious of their magnanimous superiority over both sets, for whose entertainment they were ticketed.

This is a pudding indeed! And the contemplation of the skill and energy required to get together and compound such a Brookfield Pudding, well-nigh leads one to think the work that is done out of doors a very inferior business, and, as it were, mere gathering of fuel for the fire inside. It was known in the neighbourhood that the ladies were preparing one; and moreover that they had a new kind of plum; in other words, that they intended to exhibit a prodigy of genius, who would flow upon the world from Brookfield. To announce her with the invitations, rejecting the idea of a surprise in the assembly, had been necessary, because there was no other way of securing Lady Gosstre, who led the society of the district. The great lady gave her promise to attend: "though," as she said to Arabella, "you must know I abominate musical parties, and think them the most absurd of entertainments possible; but if you have anything to show, that's another matter."

Two or three chosen friends were invited down beforehand to inspect the strange girl, and say what they thought of her; for the ladies themselves were perplexed. They had found her to be commonplace: a creature without ideas and with a decided appetite. So when Tracy Runningbrook, who had also been a plum in his day, and was still a poet, said that she was exquisitely comic, they were induced to take the humorous view of the inexplicable side in the character of Miss Belloni, and tried to laugh at her eccentricities. Seeing that Mr. Pericles

approved of her voice as a singer, and Tracy Runningbrook let pass her behaviour as a girl, they conceived that on the whole they were safe in sounding a trumpet loudly. These gentlemen were connoisseurs, each in his walk.

Concerning her position and parentage, nothing was known. She had met Adela's delicately-searching touches in that direction with a marked reserve. It was impossible to ask her point-blank, after probing her with a dozen suggestions, for the ingenuousness of an indifferent inquiry could not then be assumed, so that Adela was constantly baked and felt that she must some day be excessively 'fond with her,' which was annoying. The girl lit up at any sign of affection. A kind look gave Summer depths to her dark eyes. Otherwise she maintained a simple discretion and walked in her own path, content to look quietly pleased on everybody, as one who had plenty to think of and a voice in her ear.

Apparently she was not to be taught to understand 'limits': which must be explained as a sort of magnetic submissiveness to the variations of Polar caprice; so that she should move about with ease, be cheerful, friendly, and, at a signal, affectionate; still not failing to recognize the particular nooks where the family chalk had traced a line. As the day of exhibition approached, Adela thought she would give her a lesson in limits. She ventured to bestow a small caress on the girl, after a compliment; thinking that the compliment would be a check: but the compliment was passed, and the caress instantly replied to with two arms and a tender mouth. At which, Adela took fright and was glad to slip away.

At last the pudding flowed into the bag.

Emilia was posted by the ladies in a corner of the room. Receiving her assurance that she was not hungry, they felt satisfied that she wanted nothing. Wilfrid came up to her to console her for her loneliness, until Mr. Pericles had stationed himself at the back of her chair, and then Wilfrid nodded languidly and attended to his graver duties. Who would have imagined that she had hurt him? But she certainly looked with greater animation on Mr. Pericles; and when Tracy Runningbrook sat down by her, a perfect little carol of chatter sprang up between them. These two presented such a noticeable contrast, side by side, that the ladies had to send a message to separate them. She was perhaps a little the taller of the two; with smoothed hair that had the gloss of black briony leaves, and eyes like burning brands in a cave; while Tracy's hair was red as blown flame, with eyes of a grey-green hue, that may be seen glistening over wet sunset. People, who knew him, asked: "Who is she?" and it was not in the design of the ladies to have her noted just yet.

Lady Gosstre's exclamation on entering the room was presently heard. "Well! and where's our extraordinary genius? Pray, let me see her immediately."

Thereat Laura Tinley, with gross ill-breeding, rushed up to Arabella, who was receiving her ladyship, and touching her arm, as if privileges were permitted her, cried: "I'm dying to see her. Has she come?"

Arabella embraced the offensive girl in a hostess's smile, and talked flowingly to the great lady.

Laura Tinley was punished by being requested to lead off with a favourite song in a buzz. She acceded, quite aware of the honour intended, and sat at the piano, taming as much as possible her pantomime of one that would be audible. Lady Gosstre scanned the room, while Adela, following her ladyship's eyeglass, named the guests.

"You get together a quaint set of men," said Lady Gosstre.

"Women!" was on Adela's tongue's tip. She had really thought well of her men. Her heart sank.

"In the country!" she began.

"Yes, yes!" went my lady.

These were the lessons that made the ladies of Brookfield put a check upon youth's tendency to feel delightful satisfaction with its immediate work, and speedily conceive a discontented suspicion of anything whatsoever that served them.

Two other sacrifices were offered at the piano after Laura Tinley. Poor victims of ambition, they arranged their dresses, smiled at the leaves, and deliberately gave utterance to the dreadful nonsense of the laureates of our drawing-rooms. Mr. Pericles and Emilia exchanged scientific glances during the performance. She was merciless to indifferent music. Wilfrid saw the glances pass. So, now, when Emilia was beckoned to the piano, she passed by Wilfrid, and had a cold look in return for beaming eyes.

According to directions, Emilia sang a simple Neapolitan air. The singer was unknown, and was generally taken for another sacrifice.

"Come; that's rather pretty," Lady Gosstre hailed the close.

"It is of ze people—such as zat," assented Mr. Pericles.

Adela heard my lady ask for the singer's name. She made her way to her sisters. Adela was ordinarily the promoter, Cornelia the sifter, and Arabella the director, of schemes in this management. The ladies had a moment for counsel over a music-book, for Arabella was about to do duty at the piano. During a pause, Mr. Pole lifting his white waistcoat with the effort, sent a word abroad, loudly and heartily, regardless of its guardian aspirate, like a bold-faced hoyden flying from her chaperon. They had dreaded it. They loved their father, but declined to think his grammar parental. Hushing together, they agreed that it had been a false move to invite Lady Gosstre, who did not care a bit for music, until the success of their Genius was assured by persons who did. To suppose that she would recognize a Genius, failing a special introduction, was absurd. The ladies could turn upon aristocracy too, when it suited them.

Arabella had now to go through a quartett. The fever of ill-luck had seized the violin. He would not tune. Then his string broke; and while he was arranging it the footman came up to Arabella. Misfortunes, we know, are the most united family on earth. The news brought to her was that a lady of the name of Mrs. Chump was below. Holding her features rigidly bound, not to betray

perturbation, Arabella confided the fact to Cornelia, who, with a similar mental and muscular compression, said instantly, "Manoeuvre her." Adela remarked, "If you tell her the company is grand, she will come, and her Irish once heard here will destroy us. The very name of Chump!"

Mrs. Chump was the wealthy Irish widow of an alderman, whose unaccountable bad taste in going to Ireland for a wife, yet filled the ladies with astonishment. She pretended to be in difficulties with her lawyers; for which reason she strove to be perpetually in consultation with her old flame and present trustee Mr. Pole. The ladies had fought against her in London, and since their installation at Brookfield they had announced to their father that she was not to be endured there. Mr. Pole had plaintively attempted to dilate on the virtues of Martha Chump. "In her place," said the ladies, and illustrated to him that amid a nosegay of flowers there was no fit room for an exuberant vegetable. The old man had sighed and seemed to surrender. One thing was certain: Mrs. Chump had never been seen at Brookfield. "She never shall be, save by the servants," said the ladies.

Emilia, not unmarked of Mr. Pericles, had gone over to Wilfrid once or twice, to ask him if haply he disapproved of anything she had done. Mr. Pericles shrugged, and went "Ah!" as who should say, "This must be stopped." Adela now came to her and caught her hand, showering sweet whispers on her, and bidding her go to her harp and do her best. "We love you; we all love you!" was her parting instigation.

The quartett was abandoned. Arabella had departed with a firm countenance to combat Mrs. Chump.

Emilia sat by her harp. The saloon was critically still; so still that Adela fancied she heard a faint Irish protest from the parlour. Wilfrid was perhaps the most critical auditor present: for he doubted whether she could renew that singular charm of her singing in the pale lighted woods. The first smooth contralto notes took him captive. He scarcely believed that this could be the raw girl whom his sisters delicately pitied.

A murmur of plaudits, the low thunder of gathering acclamation, went round. Lady Gosstre looked a satisfied, "This will do." Wilfrid saw Emilia's eyes appeal hopefully to Mr. Pericles. The connoisseur shrugged. A pain lodged visibly on her black eyebrows. She gripped her harp, and her eyelids appeared to quiver as she took the notes. Again, and still singing, she turned her head to him. The eyes of Mr. Pericles were white, as if upraised to intercede for her with the Powers of Harmony. Her voice grew unnerved. On a sudden she excited herself to pitch and give volume to that note which had been the enchantment of the night in the woods. It quavered. One might have thought her caught by the throat.

Emilia gazed at no one now. She rose, without a word or an apology, keeping her eyes down.

"Fiasco!" cruelly cried Mr. Pericles.

That was better to her than the silly kindness of the people who deemed it well to encourage her with applause. Emilia could not bear the clapping of hands, and fled.

CHAPTER V

The night was warm under a slowly-floating moon. Full of compassion for the poor girl, who had moved him if she had failed in winning the assembly, Wilfrid stepped into the garden, where he expected to find her, and to be the first to pet and console her. Threading the scented shrubs, he came upon a turn in one of the alleys, from which point he had a view of her figure, as she stood near a Portugal laurel on the lawn. Mr. Pericles was by her side. Wilfrid's intention was to join them. A loud sob from Emilia checked his foot.

"You are cruel," he heard her say.

"If it is good, I tell it you; if it is bad; abominable, I tell it you, juste ze same," responded Mr. Pericles.

"The others did not think it very bad."

"Ah! bah!" Mr. Pericles cut her short.

Had they been talking of matters secret and too sweet, Wilfrid would have retired, like a man of honour. As it was, he continued to listen. The tears of his poor little friend, moreover, seemed to hold him there in the hope that he might afford some help.

"Yes; I do not care for the others," she resumed. "You praised me the night I first saw you."

"It is perhaps zat you can sing to z' moon," returned Mr. Pericles. "But, what! a singer, she must sing in a house. To-night it is warm, to-morrow it is cold. If you sing through a cold, what noise do we hear? It is a nose, not a voice. It is a trompet."

Emilia, with a whimpering firmness, replied: "You said I am lazy. I am not."

"Not lazy," Mr. Pericles assented.

"Do I care for praise from people who do not understand music? It is not true. I only like to please them."

"Be a street-organ," Mr. Pericles retorted.

"I must like to see them pleased when I sing," said Emilia desperately.

"And you like ze clap of ze hands. Yez. It is quite natural. Yess. You are a good child, it is clear. But, look. You are a voice uncultivated, sauvage. You go wrong: I hear you: and dese claps of zese noodels send you into squeaks and shrills, and false! false away you go. It is a gallop ze wrong way."

Here Mr. Pericles attempted the most horrible reproduction of Emilia's failure. She cried out as if she had been bitten.

"What am I to do?" she asked sadly.

"Not now," Mr. Pericles answered. "You live in London?—at where?"

"Must I tell you?"

"Certainly, you must tell me."

"But, I am not going there; I mean, not yet."

"You are going to sing to z' moon through z' nose. Yez. For how long?"

"These ladies have asked me to stay with them. They make me so happy. When I leave them—then!"

Emilia sighed.

"And zen?" quoth Mr. Pericles.

"Then, while my money lasts, I shall stay in the country."

"How much money?"

"How much money have I?" Emilia frankly and accurately summed up the condition of her treasury. "Four pounds and nineteen shillings."

"Hom! it is spent, and you go to your father again?"

"Yes."

"To ze old Belloni?"

"My father."

"No!" cried Mr. Pericles, upon Emilia's melancholy utterance. He bent to her ear and rapidly spoke, in an undertone, what seemed to be a vivid sketch of a new course of fortune for her. Emilia gave one joyful outcry; and now Wilfrid retreated, questioning within himself whether he should have remained so long. But, as he argued, if he was convinced that the rascally Greek

fellow meant mischief to her, was he not bound to employ every stratagem to be her safeguard? The influence of Mr. Pericles already exercised over her was immense and mysterious. Within ten minutes she was singing triumphantly indoors. Wilfrid could hear that her voice was firm and assured. She was singing the song of the woods. He found to his surprise that his heart dropped under some burden, as if he had no longer force to sustain it.

By-and-by some of the members of the company issued forth. Carriages were heard on the gravel, and young men in couples, preparing to light the ensign of happy release from the ladies (or of indemnification for their absence, if you please), strolled about the grounds.

"Did you see that little passage between Laura Tinley and Bella Pole?" said one, and forthwith mimicked them: "Laura commencing:—'We must have her over to us.' 'I fear we have pre-engaged her.'—'Oh, but you, dear, will do us the favour to come, too?' 'I fear, dear, our immediate engagements will preclude the possibility.'—'Surely, dear Miss Pole, we may hope that you have not abandoned us?'—'That, my dear Miss Tinley, is out of the question.'—'May we not name a day?'—'If it depends upon us, frankly, we cannot bid you do so.'"

The other joined him in laughter, adding: "'Frankly' 's capital! What absurd creatures women are! How the deuce did you manage to remember it all?"

"My sister was at my elbow. She repeated it, word for word."

"Pon my honour, women are wonderful creatures!"

The two young men continued their remarks, with a sense of perfect consistency.

Lady Gosstre, as she was being conducted to her carriage, had pronounced aloud that Emilia was decidedly worth hearing.

"She's better worth knowing," said Tracy Runningbrook. "I see you are all bent on spoiling her. If you were to sit and talk with her, you would perceive that she's meant for more than to make a machine of her throat. What a throat it is! She has the most comical notion of things. I fancy I'm looking at the budding of my own brain. She's a born artist, but I'm afraid everybody's conspiring to ruin her."

"Surely," said Adela, "we shall not do that, if we encourage her in her Art."

"He means another kind of art," said Lady Gosstre. "The term 'artist,' applied to our sex, signifies 'Frenchwoman' with him. He does not allow us to be anything but women. As artists then we are largely privileged, I assure you."

"Are we placed under a professor to learn the art?" Adela inquired, pleased with the subject under such high patronage.

"Each new experience is your accomplished professor," said Tracy. "One I'll call Cleopatra a professor: she's but an illustrious example."

"Imp! you are corrupt." With which my lady tapped farewell on his shoulder. Leaning from the carriage window, she said: "I suppose I shall see you at Richford? Merthyr Powys is coming this week. And that reminds me: he would be the man to appreciate your 'born artist.' Bring her to me. We will have a dinner. I will despatch a formal invitation to-morrow. The season's bad out of town for getting decent people to meet you. I will do my best."

She bowed to Adela and Tracy. Mr. Pole, who had hovered around the unfamiliar dialogue to attend the great lady to the door, here came in for a recognition, and bowed obsequiously to the back of the carriage.

Arabella did not tell her sisters what weapons she had employed to effect the rout of Mrs. Chump. She gravely remarked that the woman had consented to go, and her sisters thanked her. They were mystified by Laura's non-recognition of Emilia, and only suspected Wilfrid so faintly that they were able to think they did not suspect him at all. On the whole, the evening had been a success. It justified the ladies in repeating a well-known Brookfield phrase: "We may be wrong in many things, but never in our judgement of the merits of any given person." In the case of Tracy Runningbrook, they had furnished a signal instance of their discernment. Him they had met at the house of a friend of the Tinleys (a Colonel's wife distantly connected with great houses). The Tinleys laughed at his flaming head and him, but the ladies of Brookfield had ears and eyes for a certain tone and style about him, before they learnt that he was of the blood of dukes, and would be a famous poet. When this was mentioned, after his departure, they had made him theirs, and the Tinleys had no chance. Through Tracy, they achieved their introduction to Lady Gosstre. And now they were to dine with her. They did not say that this was through Emilia. In fact, they felt a little that they had this evening been a sort of background to their prodigy: which was not in the design. Having observed, "She sang deliciously," they dismissed her, and referred to dresses, gaucheries of members of the company, pretensions here and there, Lady Gosstre's walk, the way to shuffle men and women, how to start themes for them to converse upon, and so forth. Not Juno and her Court surveying our mortal requirements in divine independence of fatigue, could have been more considerate for the shortcomings of humanity. And while they were legislating this and that for others, they still accepted hints for their own improvement, as those who have Perfection in view may do. Lady Gosstre's carriage of her shoulders, and general manner, were admitted to be worthy of study. "And did you notice when Laura Tinley interrupted her conversation with Tracy Runningbrook, how quietly she replied to the fact and nothing else, so that Laura had not another word?"—"And did you observe her deference to papa, as host?"—"And did you not see, on more than one occasion, with what consummate ease she would turn a current of dialogue when it had gone far enough?" They had all noticed, seen, and observed. They agreed that there was a quality beyond art, beyond genius, beyond any special cleverness; and that was, the great social quality of taking, as by nature, without assumption, a queenly position in a circle, and making harmony of all the instruments to be found in it. High praise of Lady Gosstre ensued. The ladies of Brookfield allowed themselves to bow to her with the greater humility, owing to the secret sense they nursed of overtopping her still in that ineffable Something which they alone possessed: a casket little people will be wise in not hurrying our Father Time to open for them, if they would continue to enjoy the jewel they suppose it to contain. Finally, these energetic young ladies said their prayers by the morning twitter of the birds, and went to their beds, less from a desire for rest than because custom demanded it.

Three days later Emilia was a resident in the house, receiving lessons in demeanour from Cornelia, and in horsemanship from Wilfrid. She expressed no gratitude for kindnesses or wonder at the change in her fortune, save that pleasure sat like an inextinguishable light on her face. A splendid new harp arrived one day, ticketed, "For Miss Emilia Belloni."

"He does not know I have a second Christian name," was her first remark, after an examination of the instrument.

"He?" quoth Adela. "May it not have been a lady's gift?"

Emilia clearly thought not.

"And to whom do you ascribe it?"

"Who sent it to me? Mr. Pericles, of course."

She touched the strings immediately, and sighed.

"Are you discontented with the tone, child?" asked Adela.

"No. I—I'll guess what it cost!"

Surely the ladies had reason to think her commonplace!

She explained herself better to Wilfrid, when he returned to Brookfield after a short absence. Showing the harp, "See what Mr. Pericles thinks me worth!" she said.

"Not more than that?" was his gallant rejoinder. "Does it suit you?"

"Yes; in every way."

This was all she said about it.

In the morning after breakfast, she sat at harp or piano, and then ran out to gather wild flowers and learn the names of trees and birds. On almost all occasions Wilfrid was her companion. He laughed at the little sisterly revelations the ladies confided concerning her too heartily for them to have any fear that she was other than a toy to him. Few women are aware with how much ease sentimental men can laugh outwardly at what is internal torment. They had apprised him of their wish to know what her origin was, and of her peculiar reserve on that topic: whereat he assured them that she would have no secrets from him. His conduct of affairs was so open that none could have supposed the gallant cornet entangled in a maze of sentiment. For, veritably, this girl was the last sort of girl to please his fancy; and he saw not a little of fair ladies: by virtue of his heroic antecedents, he was himself well seen of them. The gallant cornet adored delicacy and a gilded refinement. The female flower could not be too exquisitely cultivated to satisfy him. And here he was, running after a little unformed girl, who had no care to conceal the fact that she was an animal, nor any notion of the necessity for doing so! He had good reason to laugh when his

sisters talked of her. It was not a pleasant note which came from the gallant cornet then. But, in the meadows, or kindly conducting Emilia's horse, he yielded pretty music. Emilia wore Arabella's riding-habit, Adela's hat, and Cornelia's gloves. Politic as the ladies of Brookfield were, they were full of natural kindness; and Wilfrid, albeit a diplomatist, was not yet mature enough to control and guide a very sentimental heart. There was an element of dim imagination in all the family: and it was this that consciously elevated them over the world in prospect, and made them unconsciously subject to what I must call the spell of the poetic power.

Wilfrid in his soul wished that Emilia should date from the day she had entered Brookfield. But at times it seemed to him that a knowledge of her antecedents might relieve him from his ridiculous perplexity of feeling. Besides though her voice struck emotion, she herself was unimpressible. "Cold by nature," he said; looking at the unkindled fire. She shook hands like a boy. If her fingers were touched and retained, they continued to be fingers for as long as you pleased. Murmurs and whispers passed by her like the breeze. She appeared also to have no enthusiasm for her Art, so that not even there could Wilfrid find common ground. Italy, however, he discovered to be the subject that made her light up. Of Italy he would speak frequently, and with much simulated fervour.

"Mr. Pericles is going to take me there," said Emilia. "He told me to keep it secret. I have no secrets from my friends. I am to learn in the academy at Milan."

"Would you not rather let me take you?"

"Not quite." She shook her head. "No; because you do not understand music as he does. And are you as rich? I cost a great deal of money even for eating alone. But you will be glad when you hear me when I come back. Do you hear that nightingale? It must be a nightingale."

She listened. "What things he makes us feel!"

Bending her head, she walked on silently. Wilfrid, he knew not why, had got a sudden hunger for all the days of her life. He caught her hand and, drawing her to a garden seat, said: "Come; now tell me all about yourself before I knew you. Do you mind?"

"I'll tell you anything you want to hear," said Emilia.

He enjoined her to begin from the beginning.

"Everything about myself?" she asked.

"Everything. I have your permission to smoke?"

Emilia smiled. "I wish I had some Italian cigars to give you. My father sometimes has plenty given to him."

Wilfrid did not contemplate his havannah with less favour.

"Now," said Emilia, taking a last sniff of the flowers before surrendering her nostril to the invading smoke. She looked at the scene fronting her under a blue sky with slow flocks of clouds: "How I like this!" she exclaimed. "I almost forget that I long for Italy, here."

Beyond a plot of flowers, a gold-green meadow dipped to a ridge of gorse bordered by dark firs and the tips of greenest larches.

CHAPTER VI

"My father is one of the most wonderful men in the whole world!"

Wilfrid lifted an eyelid.

"He is one of the first-violins at the Italian Opera!"

The gallant cornet's critical appreciation of this impressive announcement was expressed in a spiral ebullition of smoke from his mouth.

"He is such a proud man! And I don't wonder at that: he has reason to be proud."

Again Wilfrid lifted an eyelid, and there is no knowing but that ideas of a connection with foreign Counts, Cardinals, and Princes passed hopefully through him.

"Would you believe that he is really the own nephew of Andronizetti!"

"Deuce he is!" said Wilfrid, in a mist. "Which one?"

"The composer!"

Wilfrid emitted more smoke.

"Who composed—how I love him!—that lovely 'la, la, la, la,' and the 'te-de, ta-da, te-dio,' that pleases you, out of 'Il Maladetto.' And I am descended from him! Let me hope I shall not be unworthy of him. You will never tell it till people think as much of me, or nearly. My father says I shall never be so great, because I am half English. It's not my fault. My mother was English. But I feel that I am much more Italian than English. How I long for Italy—like a thing underground! My father did something against the Austrians, when he was a young man. Would not I have done it? I am sure I would—I don't know what. Whenever I think of Italy, night or day, pant-pant goes my heart. The name of Italy is my nightingale: I feel that somebody lives that I love, and is ill-treated shamefully, crying out to me for help. My father had to run away to

save his life. He was fifteen days lying in the rice-fields to escape from the soldiers—which makes me hate a white coat. There was my father; and at night he used to steal out to one of the villages, where was a good, true woman—so they are, most, in Italy! She gave him food; maize-bread and wine, sometimes meat; sometimes a bottle of good wine. When my father thinks of it he cries, if there is gin smelling near him. At last my father had to stop there day and night. Then that good woman's daughter came to him to keep him from starving; she risked being stripped naked and beaten with rods, to keep my father from starving. When my father speaks of Sandra now, it makes my mother—she does not like it. I am named after her: Emilia Alessandra Belloni. 'Sandra' is short for it. She did not know why I was christened that, and will never call me anything but Emilia, though my father says Sandra, always. My father never speaks of that dear Sandra herself, except when he is tipsy. Once I used to wish him to be tipsy; for then I used to sit at my piano while he talked, and I made all his words go into music. One night I did it so well, my father jumped right up from his chair, shouting 'Italia!' and he caught his wig off his head, and threw it into the fire, and rushed out into the street quite bald, and people thought him mad.

"It was the beginning of all our misfortunes! My father was taken and locked up in a place as a tipsy man. That he has never forgiven the English for! It has made me and my mother miserable ever since. My mother is sure it is all since that night. Do you know, I remember, though I was so young, that I felt the music—oh! like a devil in my bosom? Perhaps it was, and it passed out of me into him. Do you think it was?"

Wilfrid answered: "Well, no! I shouldn't think you had anything to do with the devil." Indeed, he was beginning to think her one of the smallest of frocked female essences.

"I lost my piano through it," she went on. "I could not practise. I was the most miserable creature in all the world till I fell in love with my harp. My father would not play to get money. He sat in his chair, and only spoke to ask about meal-time, and we had no money for food, except by selling everything we had. Then my piano went. So then I said to my mother, I will advertize to give lessons, as other people do, and make money for us all, myself. So we paid money for a brass-plate, and our landlady's kind son put it up on the door for nothing, and we waited for pupils to come. I used to pray to the Virgin that she would blessedly send me pupils, for my poor mother's complaints were so shrill and out of tune it's impossible to tell you what I suffered. But by-and-by my father saw the brass-plate. He fell into one of his dreadful passions. We had to buy him another wig. His passions were so expensive: my mother used to say, 'There goes our poor dinner out of the window!' But, well! he went to get employment now. He can, always, when he pleases; for such a touch on the violin as my father has, you never heard. You feel yourself from top to toe, when my father plays. I feel as if I breathed music like air. One day came news from Italy, all in the newspaper, of my father's friends and old companions shot and murdered by the Austrians. He read it in the evening, after we had a quiet day. I thought he did not mind it much, for he read it out to us quite quietly; and then he made me sit on his knee and read it out. I cried with rage, and he called to me, 'Sandra! Peace!' and began walking up and down the room, while my mother got the bread and cheese and spread it on the table, for we were beginning to be richer. I saw my father take out his violin. He put it on the cloth and looked at it. Then he took it up, and laid his chin on it like a man full of love, and drew the bow across just once. He whirled away the bow, and knocked down our candle, and in the darkness I heard something snap and break with a hollow sound. When I could see, he had broken it, the neck from the body—the

dear old violin! I could cry still. I—I was too late to save it. I saw it broken, and the empty belly, and the loose strings! It was murdering a spirit—that was! My father sat in a corner one whole week, moping like such an old man! I was nearly dead with my mother's voice. By-and-by we were all silent, for there was nothing to eat. So I said to my mother, 'I will earn money.' My mother cried. I proposed to take a lodging for myself, all by myself; go there in the morning and return at night, and give lessons, and get money for them. My landlady's good son gave me the brass-plate again. Emilia Alessandra Belloni! I was glad to see my name. I got two pupils very quickly one, an old lady, and one, a young one. The old lady—I mean, she was not grey—wanted a gentleman to marry her, and the landlady told me—I mean my pupil—it makes me laugh—asked him what he thought of her voice: for I had been singing. I earned a great deal of money: two pounds ten shillings a week. I could afford to pay for lessons myself, I thought. What an expense! I had to pay ten shillings for one lesson! Some have to pay twenty; but I would pay it to learn from the best masters;—and I had to make my father and mother live on potatoes, and myself too, of course. If you buy potatoes carefully, they are extremely cheap things to live upon, and make you forget your hunger more than anything else.

"I suppose," added Emilia, "you have never lived upon potatoes entirely? Oh, no!"

Wilfrid gave a quiet negative.

"But I was pining to learn, and was obliged to keep them low. I could pitch any notes, and I was clear but I was always ornamenting, and what I want is to be an accurate singer. My music-master was a German—not an Austrian—oh, no!—I'm sure he was not. At least, I don't think so, for I liked him. He was harsh with me, but sometimes he did stretch his fingers on my head, and turn it round, and say words that I pretended not to think of, though they sent me home burning. I began to compose, and this gentleman tore up the whole sheet in a rage, when I showed it him; but he gave me a dinner, and left off charging me ten shillings—only seven, and then five—and he gave me more time than he gave others. He also did something which I don't know yet whether I can thank him for. He made me know the music of the great German. I used to listen: I could not believe such music could come from a German. He followed me about, telling me I was his slave. For some time I could not sleep. I laughed at myself for composing. He was not an Austrian: but when he was alive he lived in Vienna, the capital of Austria. He ate Austrian bread, and why God gave him such a soul of music I never can think!—Well, by-and-by my father wanted to know what I did in the day, and why they never had anything but potatoes for dinner. My mother came to me, and I told her to say, I took walks. My father said I was an idle girl, and like my mother—who was a slave to work. People are often unjust! So my father said he would watch me. I had to cross the park to give a lesson to a lady who had a husband, and she wanted to sing to him to keep him at home in the evening. I used to pray he might not have much ear for music. One day a gentleman came behind me in the park. He showed me a handkerchief, and asked me if it was mine. I felt for my own and found it in my pocket. He was certain I had dropped it. He looked in the corners for the name, I told him my name—Emilia Alessandra Belloni. He found A.F.G. there. It was a beautiful cambric handkerchief, white and smooth. I told him it must be a gentleman's, as it was so large; but he said he had picked it up close by me, and he could not take it, and I must; and I was obliged to keep it, though I would much rather not. Near the end of the park he left me."

At this point Wilfrid roused up. "You met him the next day near the same place?" he remarked.

She turned to him with astonishment on her features. "How did you know that? How could you know?"

"Sort of thing that generally happens," said Wilfrid.

"Yes; he was there," Emilia slowly pursued, controlling her inclination to question further. "He had forgotten about the handkerchief, for when I saw him, I fancied he might have found the owner. We talked together. He told me he was in the Army, and I spoke of my father's playing and my singing. He was so fond of music that I promised him he should hear us both. He used to examine my hand, and said they were sensitive fingers for playing. I knew that. He had great hopes of me. He said he would give me a box at the Opera, now and then. I was mad with joy; and so delighted to have made a friend. I had never before made a rich friend. I sang to him in the park. His eyes looked beautiful with pleasure. I know I enchanted him."

"How old were you then?" inquired Wilfrid.

"Sixteen. I can sing better now, I know; but I had voice then, and he felt that I had. I forgot where we were, till people stood round us, and he hurried me away from them, and said I must sing to him in some quiet place. I promised to, and he promised he would have dinner for me at Richmond Hill, in the country, and he would bring friends to hear me."

"Go on," said Wilfrid, rather sharply.

She sighed. "I only saw him once after that. It was such a miserable day! It rained. It was Saturday. I did not expect to find him in the rain; but there he stood, exactly where he had given me the handkerchief. He smiled kindly, as I came up. I dislike gloomy people! His face was always fresh and nice. His moustache reminded me of Italy. I used to think of him under a great warm sky, with olives and vine-trees and mulberries like my father used to speak of. I could have flung my arms about his neck."

"Did you?" The cornet gave a strangled note.

"Oh, no!" said Emilia seriously. "But I told him how happy the thought of going into the country made me, and that it was almost like going to Italy. He told me he would take me to Italy, if I liked. I could have knelt at his feet. Unfortunately his friends could not come. Still, I was to go, and dine, and float on the water, plucking flowers. I determined to fancy myself in Venice, which is the place my husband must take me to, when I am married to him. I will give him my whole body and soul for his love, when I am there!"

Here the cornet was capable of articulate music for a moment, but it resolved itself into: "Well, well! Yes, go on!"

"I took his arm this time. It gave me my first timid feeling that I remember, and he laughed at me, and drove it quite away, telling me his name: Augustus Frederick what was it? Augustus

Frederick—it began with G something. O me! have I really forgotten? Christian names are always easier to remember. A captain he was—a riding one; just like you. I think you are all kind!"

"Extremely," muttered the ironical cornet. "A.F.G.;—those are the initials on the handkerchief!"

"They are!" cried Emilia. "It must have been his own handkerchief!"

"You have achieved the discovery," quoth Wilfrid. "He dropped it there overnight, and found it just as you were passing in the morning."

"That must be impossible," said Emilia, and dismissed the subject forthwith, in a feminine power of resolve to be blind to it.

"I am afraid," she took up her narrative, "my father is sometimes really almost mad. He does such things! I had walked under this gentleman's umbrella to the bridge between the park and the gardens with the sheep, and beautiful flowers in beds. In an instant my father came up right in our faces. He caught hold of my left hand. I thought he wanted to shake it, for he imitates English ways at times, even with us at home, and shakes our hands when he comes in. But he swung me round. He stood looking angrily at this gentleman, and cried 'Yes! yes!' to every word he spoke. The gentleman bowed to me, and asked me to take his umbrella; but I was afraid to; and my father came to me,—oh, Madonna, think of what he did! I saw that his pockets were very big. He snatched out potatoes, and began throwing them as hard as he could throw them at the gentleman, and struck him with some of them. He threw nine large potatoes! I begged him to think of our dinner; but he cried 'Yes! it is our dinner we give to your head, vagabond!' in his English. I could not help running up to the gentleman to beg for his pardon. He told me not to cry, and put some potatoes he had been picking up all into my hand. They were muddy, but he wiped them first; and he said it was not the first time he had stood fire, and then said good-bye; and I slipped the potatoes into my pocket immediately, thankful that they were not wasted. My father pulled me away roughly from the laughing and staring people on the bridge. But I knew the potatoes were only bruised. Even three potatoes will prevent you from starving. They were very fine ones, for I always took care to buy them good. When I reached home—"

Wilfrid had risen, and was yawning with a desperate grimace. He bade her continue, and pitched back heavily into his seat.

"When I reached home and could be alone with my mother, she told me my father had been out watching me the day before, and that he had filled his pockets that morning. She thought he was going to walk out in the country and get people on the road to cook them for him. That is what he has done when he was miserable,—to make himself quite miserable, I think, for he loves streets best. Guess my surprise! My mother was making my head ache with her complaints, when, as I drew out the potatoes to show her we had some food, there was a purse at the bottom of my pocket,—a beautiful green purse! O that kind gentleman! He must have put it in my hand with the potatoes that my father flung at him! How I have cried to think that I may never sing to him my best to please him! My mother and I opened the purse eagerly. It had ten pounds in paper money, and five sovereigns, and silver,—I think four shillings. We determined to keep it a

secret; and then we thought of the best way of spending it, and decided not to spend it all, but to keep some for when we wanted it dreadfully, and for a lesson or two for me now and then, and a music-score, and perhaps a good violin for my father, and new strings for him and me, and meat dinners now and then, and perhaps a day in the country: for that was always one of my dreams as I watched the clouds flying over London. They seemed to be always coming from happy places and going to happy places, never stopping where I was! I cannot be sorrowful long. You know that song of mine that you like so much—my own composing? It was a song about that kind gentleman. I got words to suit it as well as I could, from a penny paper, but they don't mean anything that I mean, and they are only words."

She did not appear to hear the gallant cornet's denial that he cared particularly for that song.

"What I meant was,—that gentleman speaks—I have fought for Italy; I am an English hero and have fought for Italy, because of an Italian child; but now I am wounded and a prisoner. When you shoot me, cruel Austrians, I shall hear her voice and think of nothing else, so you cannot hurt me."

Emilia turned spitefully on herself at this close. "How I spoil it! My words are always stupid, when I feel.—Well, now my mother and I were quite peaceful, and my father was better fed. One night he brought home a Jew gentleman, beautifully dressed, with diamonds all over him. He sparkled like the Christmas cakes in pastry-cooks' windows. I sang to him, and he made quite a noise about me. But the man made me so uncomfortable, touching my shoulders, and I could not bear his hands, even when he was praising me. I sang to him till the landlady made me leave off, because of the other lodgers who wanted to sleep. He came every evening; and then said I should sing at a concert. It turned out to be a public-house, and my father would not let me go; but I was sorry; for in public the man could not touch me as he did. It damped the voice!"

"I should like to know where that fellow lives," cried the cornet.

"I don't know, I'm sure," she said. "He lends money. Do you want any? I heard your sisters say something, one day. You can always have all that I have, you know."

A quick spirit of pity and honest kindness went through Wilfrid's veins and threatened to play the woman with his eyes, for a moment. He took her hand and pressed it. She put her lips to his fingers.

"Once," she continued, "when the Jew gentleman had left, I spoke to my father of his way with me, and then my father took me on his knee, and the things he told me of what that man felt for me made my mother come and tear me away to bed. I was obliged to submit to the Jew gentleman patting and touching me always. He used to crush my dreams afterwards! I know my voice was going. My father was so eager for me to please him, I did my best; but I felt dull, and used to sit and shake my head at my harp, crying; or else I felt like an angry animal, and could have torn the strings.

"Think how astonished I was when my mother came to me to say my father had money in his pockets!—one pound, seventeen shillings, she counted: and he had not been playing! Then he

brought home a new violin, and he said to me, 'I shall go; I shall play; I am Orphee, and dinners shall rise!' I was glad, and kissed him; and he said, 'This is Sandra's gift to me,' showing the violin. I only knew what that meant two days afterwards. Is a girl not seventeen fit to be married?"

With this abrupt and singular question she had taken an indignant figure, and her eyes were fiery: so that Wilfrid thought her much fitter than a minute before.

"Married!" she exclaimed. "My mother told me about that. You do not belong to yourself: you are tied down. You are a slave, a drudge; mustn't dream, mustn't think! I hate it. By-and-by, I suppose it will happen. Not yet! And yet that man offered to take me to Italy. It was the Jew gentleman. He said I should make money, if he took me, and grow as rich as princesses. He brought a friend to hear me, another Jew gentleman; and he was delighted, and he met me near our door the very next morning, and offered me a ring with blue stones, and he proposed to marry me also, and take me to Italy, if I would give up his friend and choose him instead. This man did not touch me, and, do you know, for some time I really thought I almost, very nearly, might,—if it had not been for his face! It was impossible to go to Italy—yes, to go to heaven! through that face of his! That face of his was just like the pictures of dancing men with animals' hairy legs and hoofs in an old thick poetry book belonging to my mother. Just fancy a nose that seemed to be pecking at great fat red lips! He met me and pressed me to go continually, till all of a sudden up came the first Jew gentleman, and he cried out quite loud in the street that he was being robbed by the other; and they stood and made a noise in the street, and I ran away. But then I heard that my father had borrowed money from the one who came first, and that his violin came from that man; and my father told me the violin would be taken from him, and he would have to go to prison, if I did not marry that man. I went and cried in my mother's arms. I shall never forget her kindness; for though she could never see anybody crying without crying herself, she did not, and was quiet as a mouse, because she knew how her voice hurt me. There's a large print-shop in one of the great streets of London, with coloured views of Italy. I used to go there once, and stand there for I don't know how long, looking at them, and trying to get those Jew gentlemen—"

"Call them Jews—they're not gentlemen," interposed Wilfrid.

"Jews," she obeyed the dictate, "out of my mind. When I saw the views of Italy they danced and grinned up and down the pictures. Oh, horrible! There was no singing for me then. My music died. At last that oldish lady gave up her lessons, and said to me, 'You little rogue! you will do what I do, some day;' for she was going to be married to that young man who thought her voice so much improved; and she paid me three pounds, and gave me one pound more, and some ribbons and gloves. I went at once to my mother, and made her give me five pounds out of the gentleman's purse. I took my harp and music-scores. I did not know where I was going, but only that I could not stop. My mother cried: but she helped to pack my things. If she disobeys me I act my father, and tower over her, and frown, and make her mild. She was such a poor good slave to me that day! but I trusted her no farther than the door. There I kissed her, full of love, and reached the railway. They asked me where I was going, and named places to me: I did not know one. I shut my eyes, and prayed to be directed, and chose Hillford. In the train I was full of music in a moment. There I met farmer Wilson, of the farm near us—where your sisters found me; and

he was kind, and asked me about myself; and I mentioned lodgings, and that I longed for woods and meadows. Just as we were getting out of the train, he said I was to come with him; and I did, very gladly. Then I met you; and I am here. All because I prayed to be directed—I do think that!"

Emilia clasped her hands, and looked pensively at the horizon sky, with a face of calm gratefulness.

The cornet was on his legs. "So!" he said. "And you never saw anything more of that fellow you kissed in the park?"

"Kissed?—that gentleman?" returned Emilia. "I have not kissed him. He did not want it. Men kiss us when we are happy, and we kiss them when they are unhappy."

Wilfrid was perhaps incompetent to test the truth of this profound aphoristic remark, delivered with the simplicity of natural conviction. The narrative had, to his thinking, quite released from him his temporary subjection to this little lady's sway. All that he felt for her personally now was pity. It speaks something for the strength of the sentiment with which he had first conceived her, that it was not pelted to death, and turned to infinite disgust, by her potatoes. For sentiment is a dainty, delicate thing, incapable of bearing much: revengeful, too, when it is outraged. Bruised and disfigured, it stood up still, and fought against them. They were very fine ones, as Emilia said, and they hit him hard. However, he pitied her, and that protected him like a shield. He told his sisters a tale of his own concerning the strange damsel, humorously enough to make them see that he enjoyed her presence as that of no common oddity.

CHAPTER VII

While Emilia was giving Wilfrid her history in the garden, the ladies of Brookfield were holding consultation over a matter which was well calculated to perplex and irritate them excessively. Mr. Pole had received a curious short epistle from Mrs. Chump, informing him of the atrocious treatment she had met with at the hands of his daughter; and instead of reviewing the orthography, incoherence, and deliberate vulgarity of the said piece of writing with the contempt it deserved, he had taken the unwonted course of telling Arabella that she had done a thing she must necessarily repent of, or in any case make apology for. An Eastern Queen, thus addressed by her Minister of the treasury, could not have felt greater indignation. Arabella had never seen her father show such perturbation of mind. He spoke violently and imperiously. The apology was ordered to be despatched by that night's post, after having been submitted to his inspection. Mr. Pole had uttered mysterious phrases: "You don't know what you've been doing:—You think the ship'll go on sailing without wind: You'll drive the horse till he drops," and such like; together with mutterings. The words were of no import whatsoever to the ladies. They were writings on the wall; untranslatable. But, as when the earth quakes our noble edifices totter, their Palace of

the Fine Shades and the Nice Feelings groaned and creaked, and for a moment they thought: "Where are we?" Very soon they concluded, that the speech Arabella had heard was due to their darling papa's defective education.

In the Council of Three, with reference to the letter of apology to Mrs. Chump, Adela proposed, if it pleased Arabella, to fight the battle of the Republic. She was young, and wished both to fight and to lead, as Arabella knew. She was checked. "It must be left to me," said Arabella.

"Of course you resist, dear?" Cornelia carelessly questioned.

"Assuredly I do."

"Better humiliation! better anything! better marriage! than to submit in such a case," cried Adela.

For, so united were the ladies of Brookfield, and so bent on their grand hazy object, that they looked upon married life unfavourably: and they had besides an idea that Wedlock, until 'late in life' (the age of thirty, say), was the burial alive of woman intellectual.

Toward midday the ladies put on their garden hats and went into the grounds together, for no particular purpose. Near the West copse they beheld Mr. Pole with Wilfrid and Emilia talking to a strange gentleman. Assuming a proper dignity, they advanced, when, to their horror, Emilia ran up to them crying: "This is Mr. Purcell Barrett, the gentleman who plays the organ at church. I met him in the woods before I knew you. I played for him the other Sunday, and I want you to know him."

She had hold of Arabella's hand and was drawing her on. There was no opportunity for retreat. Wilfrid looked as if he had already swallowed the dose. Almost precipitated into the arms of the ladies, Mr. Barrett bowed. He was a tolerably youthful man, as decently attired as old black cloth could help him to be. A sharp inspection satisfied the ladies that his hat and boots were inoffensive: whereupon they gave him the three shades of distance, tempered so as not to wound his susceptible poverty.

The superlative Polar degree appeared to invigorate Mr. Barrett. He devoted his remarks mainly to Cornelia, and cheerfully received her frozen monosyllables in exchange. The ladies talked of Organs and Art, Emilia and Opera. He knew this and that great organ, and all the operas; but he amazed the ladies by talking as if he knew great people likewise. This brought out Mr. Pole, who, since he had purchased Brookfield, had been extinguished by them and had not once thoroughly enjoyed his money's worth. A courtly poor man was a real pleasure to him.

Giving a semicircular sweep of his arm: "Here you see my little estate, sir," he said. "You've seen plenty bigger in Germany, and England too. We can't get more than this handful in our tight little island. Unless born to it, of course. Well! we must be grateful that all our nobility don't go to the dogs. We must preserve our great names. I speak against my own interest."

He lifted Adela's chin on his forefinger. She kept her eyes demurely downward, and then gazed at her sisters with gravity. These ladies took a view of Mr. Barrett. His features wore an

admirable expression of simple interest. "Well, sir; suppose you dine with us to-day?" Mr. Pole bounced out. "Neighbours should be neighbourly."

This abrupt invitation was decorously accepted.

"Plain dinner, you know. Nothing like what you get at the tables of those Erzhogs, as you call 'em, over in Germany. Simple fare; sound wine! At all events, it won't hurt you. You'll come?"

Mr. Barrett bowed, murmuring thanks. This was the very man Mr. Pole wanted to have at his board occasionally: one who had known great people, and would be thankful for a dinner. He could depreciate himself as a mere wealthy British merchant imposingly before such a man. His daughters had completely cut him off from his cronies; and the sense of restriction, and compression, and that his own house was fast becoming alien territory to him, made him pounce upon the gentlemanly organist. His daughters wondered why he should, in the presence of this stranger, exaggerate his peculiar style of speech. But the worthy merchant's consciousness of his identity was vanishing under the iron social rule of the ladies. His perishing individuality prompted the inexplicable invitation, and the form of it.

After Mr. Barrett had departed, the ladies ventured to remonstrate with their papa. He at once replied by asking whether the letter to Mrs. Chump had been written; and hearing that it had not, he desired that Arabella should go into the house and compose it straightway. The ladies coloured. To Adela's astonishment, she found that Arabella had turned. Joining her, she said, "Dearest, what a moment you have lost! We could have stood firm, continually changing the theme from Chump to Barrett, Barrett to Chump, till papa's head would have twirled. He would have begun to think Mr. Barrett the Irish widow, and Mrs. Chump the organist."

Arabella rejoined: "Your wit misleads you, darling. I know what I am about. I decline a wordy contest. To approach to a quarrel, or, say dispute, with one's parent apropos of such a person, is something worse than evil policy, don't you think?"

So strongly did the sisters admire this delicate way of masking a piece of rank cowardice, that they forgave her. The craven feeling was common to them all, which made it still more difficult to forgive her.

"Of course, we resist?" said Cornelia.

"Undoubtedly."

"We retire and retire," Adela remarked. "We waste the royal forces. But, dear me, that makes us insurgents!"

She laughed, being slightly frivolous. Her elders had the proper sentimental worship of youth and its supposed quality of innocence, and caressed her.

At the ringing of the second dinner-bell, Mr. Pole ran to the foot of the stairs and shouted for Arabella, who returned no answer, and was late in her appearance at table. Grace concluded, Mr. Pole said, "Letter gone? I wanted to see it, you know."

"It was as well not, papa," Arabella replied.

Mr. Pole shook his head seriously. The ladies were thankful for the presence of Mr. Barrett. And lo! this man was in perfect evening uniform. He looked as gentlemanly a visitor as one might wish to see. There was no trace of the poor organist. Poverty seemed rather a gold-edge to his tail-coat than a rebuke to it; just as, contrariwise, great wealth is, to the imagination, really set off by a careless costume. One need not explain how the mind acts in such cases: the fact, as I have put it, is indisputable. And let the young men of our generation mark the present chapter, that they may know the virtue residing in a tail-coat, and cling to it, whether buffeted by the waves, or burnt out by the fire, of evil angry fortune. His tail-coat safe, the youthful Briton is always ready for any change in the mind of the moody Goddess. And it is an almost certain thing that, presuming her to have a damsel of condition in view for him as a compensation for the slaps he has received, he must lose her, he cannot enter a mutual path with her, if he shall have failed to retain this article of a black tail, his social passport. I mean of course that he retain respect for the article in question. Respect for it firmly seated in his mind, the tail may be said to be always handy. It is fortune's uniform in Britain: the candlestick, if I may dare to say so, to the candle; nor need any young islander despair of getting to himself her best gifts, while he has her uniform at command, as glossy as may be.

The ladies of Brookfield were really stormed by Mr. Barrett's elegant tail. When, the first glass of wine nodded over, Mr. Pole continued the discourse of the morning, with allusions to French cooks, and his cook, their sympathies were taken captive by Mr. Barrett's tact: the door to their sympathies having been opened to him as it were by his attire. They could not guess what necessity urged Mr. Pole to assert his locked-up self so vehemently; but it certainly made the stranger shine with a beautiful mild lustre. Their spirits partly succumbed to him by a process too lengthened to explain here. Indeed, I dare do no more than hint at these mysteries of feminine emotion. I beg you to believe that when we are dealing with that wonder, the human heart female, the part played by a tail-coat and a composed demeanour is not insignificant. No doubt the ladies of Brookfield would have rebutted the idea of a tail-coat influencing them in any way as monstrous. But why was it, when Mr. Pole again harped on his cook, in almost similar words, that they were drawn to meet the eyes of the stranger, on whom they printed one of the most fabulously faint fleeting looks imaginable, with a proportionately big meaning for him that might read it? It must have been that this uniform of a tail had laid a basis of equality for the hour, otherwise they never would have done so; nor would he have enjoyed the chance of showing them that he could respond to the remotest mystic indications, with a muffled adroitness equal to their own, and so encouraged them to commence a language leading to intimacy with a rapidity that may well appear magical to the uninitiated. In short, the man really had the language of the very elect of polite society. If you are not versed in this alphabet of mute intelligence, you are in the ranks with waiters and linen-drapers, and are, as far as ladies are concerned, tail-coated to no purpose.

Mr. Pole's fresh allusion to his cook: "I hope you don't think I keep a man! No; no; not in the country. Wouldn't do. Plays the deuce, you know. My opinion is, Mrs. Mallow's as clever as any man-cook going. I'd back her:" and Mr. Barrett's speech: "She is an excellent person!" delivered briefly, with no obtrusion of weariness, confirmed the triumph of the latter; a triumph all the greater, that he seemed unconscious of it. They leaped at one bound to the conclusion that there was a romance attached to him. Do not be startled. An attested tail-coat, clearly out of its element, must contain a story: that story must be interesting; until its secret is divulged, the subtle essence of it spreads an aureole around the tail. The ladies declared, in their subsequent midnight conference, that Mr. Barrett was fit for any society. They had visions of a great family reduced; of a proud son choosing to earn his bread honourably and humbly, by turning an exquisite taste to account. Many visions of him they had, and were pleased.

Patronage of those beneath, much more than the courting of those above them, delighted the ladies of Brookfield. They allowed Emilia to give Mr. Barrett invitations, and he became a frequent visitor; always neat, pathetically well-brushed, and a pleasanter pet than Emilia, because he never shocked their niceties. He was an excellent talker, and was very soon engaged in regular contests with the argumentative Cornelia. Their political views were not always the same, as Cornelia sometimes had read the paper before he arrived. Happily, on questions of religion, they coincided. Theories of education occupied them mainly. In these contests Mr. Barrett did not fail to acknowledge his errors, when convicted, and his acknowledgment was hearty and ample. She had many clear triumphs. Still, he could be positive; a very great charm in him. Women cannot repose on a man who is not positive; nor have they much gratification in confounding him. Wouldst thou, man, amorously inclining! attract to thee superior women, be positive. Be stupidly positive, rather than dubious at all. Face fearful questions with a vizor of brass. Array thyself in dogmas. Show thy decisive judgement on the side of established power, or thy enthusiasm in the rebel ranks, if it must be so; but be firm. Waver not. If women could tolerate waverings and weakness, and did not rush to the adoration of decision of mind, we should not behold them turning contemptuously from philosophers in their agony, to find refuge in the arms of smirking orthodoxy. I do not say that Mr. Barrett ventured to play the intelligent Cornelia like a fish; but such a fish was best secured by the method he adopted: that of giving her signal victory in trifles, while on vital matters he held his own.

Very pleasant evenings now passed at Brookfield, which were not at all disturbed by the wonder expressed from time to time by Mr. Pole, that he had not heard from Martha, meaning Mrs. Chump. "You have Emilia," the ladies said; this being equivalent to "She is one of that sort;" and Mr. Pole understood it so, and fastened Emilia in one arm, with "Now, a kiss, my dear, and then a toon." Emilia readily gave both. As often as he heard instances of her want of ladylike training, he would say, "Keep her here; we'll better her." Mr. Barrett assisted the ladies to see that there was more in Emilia than even Mr. Pericles had perceived. Her story had become partially known to them; and with two friendly dependents of the household, one a gentleman and the other a genius, they felt that they had really attained a certain eminence, which is a thing to be felt only when we have something under our feet. Flying about with a desperate grip on the extreme skirts of aristocracy, the ladies knew to be the elevation of dependency, not true eminence; and though they admired the kite, they by no means wished to form a part of its tail. They had brains. A circle was what they wanted, and they had not to learn that this is to be found or made only in the liberally-educated class, into the atmosphere of which they pressed like dungeoned plants. The

parasite completes the animal, and a dependent assures us of our position. The ladies of Brookfield, therefore, let Emilia cling to them, remarking, that it seemed to be their papa's settled wish that she should reside among them for a time. Consequently, if the indulgence had ever to be regretted, they would not be to blame. In their hearts they were aware that it was Emilia who had obtained for them their first invitation to Lady Gosstre's. Gratitude was not a part of their policy, but when it assisted a recognition of material facts they did not repress it. "And if," they said, "we can succeed in polishing her and toning her, she may have something to thank us for, in the event of her ultimately making a name." That event being of course necessary for the development of so proper a sentiment. Thus the rides with Wilfrid continued, and the sweet quiet evenings when she sang.

CHAPTER VIII

The windows of Brookfield were thrown open to the air of May, and bees wandered into the rooms, gold spots of sunshine danced along the floors. The garden-walks were dazzling, and the ladies went from flower-bed to flower-bed in broad garden hats that were, as an occasional light glance flung at a window-pane assured Adela, becoming. Sunshine had burst on them suddenly, and there was no hat to be found for Emilia, so Wilfrid placed his gold-laced foraging-cap on her head, and the ladies, after a moment's misgiving, allowed her to wear it, and turned to observe her now and then. There was never pertness in Emilia's look, which on the contrary was singularly large and calm when it reposed: perhaps her dramatic instinct prompted her half-jaunty manner of leaning against the sunny corner of the house where the Chinese honeysuckle climbed. She was talking to Wilfrid. Her laughter seemed careless and easy, and in keeping with the Southern liteness of her attitude.

"To suit the cap; it's all to suit the cap," said Adela, the keen of eye. Yet, critical as was this lady, she acknowledged that it was no mere acting effort to suit the cap.

The philosopher (I would keep him back if I could) bids us mark that the crown and flower of the nervous system, the head, is necessarily sensitive, and to that degree that whatsoever we place on it, does, for a certain period, change and shape us. Of course the instant we call up the forces of the brain, much of the impression departs but what remains is powerful, and fine-nerved. Woman is especially subject to it. A girl may put on her brother's boots, and they will not affect her spirit strongly; but as soon as she puts on her brother's hat, she gives him a manly nod. The same philosopher who fathers his dulness on me, asserts that the modern vice or fastness ('Trotting on the Epicene Border,' he has it) is bred by apparently harmless practices of this description. He offers to turn the current of a Republican's brain, by resting a coronet on his forehead for just five seconds.

Howsoever these things be, it was true that Emilia's feet presently crossed, and she was soon to be seen with her right elbow doubled against her head as she leaned to the wall, and the little left fist stuck at her belt. And I maintain that she had no sense at all of acting Spanish prince disguised as page. Nor had she an idea that she was making her friend Wilfrid's heart perform to her lightest words and actions, like any trained milk-white steed in a circus. Sunlight, as well as Wilfrid's braided cap, had some magical influence on her. He assured her that she looked a charming boy, and she said, "Do I?" just lifting her chin.

A gardener was shaving the lawn.

"Please, spare those daisies," cried Emilia. "Why do you cut away daisies?"

The gardener objected that he really must make the lawn smooth. Emilia called to Adela, who came, and hearing the case, said: "Now this is nice of you. I like you to love daisies and wish to protect them. They disfigure a lawn, you know." And Adela stooped, and picked one, and called it a pet name, and dropped it.

She returned to her sisters in the conservatory, and meeting Mr. Barren at the door, made the incident a topic. "You know how greatly our Emilia rejoices us when she shows sentiment, and our thirst is to direct her to appreciate Nature in its humility as well as its grandeur."

"One expects her to have all poetical feelings," said Mr. Barrett, while they walked forth to the lawn sloping to the tufted park grass.

Cornelia said: "You have read Mr. Runningbrook's story?"

"Yes."

But the man had not brought it back, and her name was in it, written with her own hand.

"Are you of my opinion in the matter?"

"In the matter of the style? I am and I am not. Your condemnation may be correct in itself; but you say, 'He coins words'; and he certainly forces the phrase here and there, I must admit. The point to be considered is, whether friction demands a perfectly smooth surface. Undoubtedly a scientific work does, and a philosophical treatise should. When we ask for facts simply, we feel the intrusion of a style. Of fiction it is part. In the one case the classical robe, in the other any mediaeval phantasy of clothing."

"Yes; true;" said Cornelia, hesitating over her argument. "Well, I must conclude that I am not imaginative."

"On the contrary, permit me to say that you are. But your imagination is unpractised, and asks to be fed with a spoon. We English are more imaginative than most nations."

"Then, why is it not manifested?"

"We are still fighting against the Puritan element, in literature as elsewhere."

"Your old bugbear, Mr. Barrett!"

"And more than this: our language is not rich in subtleties for prose. A writer who is not servile and has insight, must coin from his own mint. In poetry we are rich enough; but in prose also we owe everything to the licence our poets have taken in the teeth of critics. Shall I give you examples? It is not necessary. Our simplest prose style is nearer to poetry with us, for this reason, that the poets have made it. Read French poetry. With the first couplet the sails are full, and you have left the shores of prose far behind. Mr. Runningbrook coins words and risks expressions because an imaginative Englishman, pen in hand, is the cadet and vagabond of the family—an exploring adventurer; whereas to a Frenchman it all comes inherited like a well filled purse. The audacity of the French mind, and the French habit of quick social intercourse, have made them nationally far richer in language. Let me add, individually as much poorer. Read their stereotyped descriptions. They all say the same things. They have one big Gallic trumpet. Wonderfully eloquent: we feel that: but the person does not speak. And now, you will be surprised to learn that, notwithstanding what I have said, I should still side with Mr. Runningbrook's fair critic, rather than with him. The reason is, that the necessity to write as he does is so great that a strong barrier—a chevaux-de-frise of pen points—must be raised against every newly minted word and hazardous coiner, or we shall be inundated. If he can leap the barrier he and his goods must be admitted. So it has been with our greatest, so it must be with the rest of them, or we shall have a Transatlantic literature. By no means desirable, I think. Yet, see: when a piece of Transatlantic slang happens to be tellingly true—something coined from an absolute experience; from a fight with the elements—we cannot resist it: it invades us. In the same way poetic rashness of the right quality enriches the language. I would make it prove its quality."

Cornelia walked on gravely. His excuse for dilating on the theme, prompted her to say: "You give me new views": while all her reflections sounded from the depths: "And yet, the man who talks thus is a hired organ-player!"

This recurring thought, more than the cogency of the new views, kept her from combating certain fallacies in them which had struck her.

"Why do you not write yourself, Mr. Barrett?"

"I have not the habit."

"The habit!"

"I have not heard the call."

"Should it not come from within?"

"And how are we to know it?"

"If it calls to you loudly!"

"Then I know it to be vanity."

"But the wish to make a name is not vanity."

"The wish to conceal a name may exist."

Cornelia took one of those little sly glances at his features which print them on the brain. The melancholy of his words threw a somber hue about him, and she began to think with mournfulness of those firm thin lips fronting misfortune: those sunken blue eyes under its shadow.

They walked up to Mr. Pole, who was standing with Wilfrid and Emilia on the lawn; giving ear to a noise in the distance.

A big drum sounded on the confines of the Brookfield estate. Soon it was seen entering the precincts at one of the principal gates, followed by trombone, and horn, and fife. In the rear trooped a regiment of Sunday-garmented villagers, with a rambling tail of loose-minded boys and girls. Blue and yellow ribands dangled from broad beaver hats, and there were rosettes of the true-blue mingled with yellow at buttonholes; and there was fun on the line of march. Jokes plumped deep into the ribs, and were answered with intelligent vivacity in the shape of hearty thwacks, delivered wherever a surface was favourable: a mode of repartee worthy of general adoption, inasmuch as it can be passed on, and so with certainty made to strike your neighbour as forcibly as yourself: of which felicity of propagation verbal wit cannot always boast. In the line of procession, the hat of a member of the corps shot sheer into the sky from the compressed energy of his brain; for he and all his comrades vociferously denied having cast it up, and no other solution was possible. This mysterious incident may tell you that beer was thus early in the morning abroad. In fact, it was the procession day of a provincial Club-feast or celebration of the nuptials of Beef and Beer; whereof later you shall behold the illustrious offspring.

All the Brookfield household were now upon the lawn, awaiting the attack. Mr. Pole would have liked to impound the impouring host, drum and all, for the audacity of the trespass, and then to have fed them liberally, as a return for the compliment. Aware that he was being treated to the honours of a great man of the neighbourhood, he determined to take it cheerfully.

"Come; no laughing!" he said, directing a glance at the maids who were ranged behind their mistresses. "'Hem! we must look pleased: we mustn't mind their music, if they mean well."

Emilia, whose face was dismally screwed up at the nerve-searching discord, said: "Why do they try to play anything but a drum?"

"In the country, in the country;" Mr. Pole emphasized. "We put up with this kind of thing in the country. Different in town; but we—a—say nothing in the country. We must encourage respect for the gentry, in the country. One of the penalties of a country life. Not much harm in it. New duties in the country."

He continued to speak to himself. In proportion as he grew aware of the unnecessary nervous agitation into which the drum was throwing him, he assumed an air of repose, and said to Wilfrid: "Read the paper to-day?" and to Arabella, "Quiet family dinner, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," he remarked to Mr. Barrett, as if resuming an old conversation: "I dare say, you've seen better marching in foreign parts. Right—left; right—left. Ha! ha! And not so bad, not so bad, I call it! with their right—left; right—left. Ha! ha! You've seen better. No need to tell me that. But, in England, we look to the meaning of things. We're a practical people. What's more, we're volunteers. Volunteers in everything. We can't make a regiment of ploughmen march like clock-work in a minute; and we don't want to. But, give me the choice; I'll back a body of volunteers any day."

"I would rather be backed by them, sir," said Mr. Barrett.

"Very good. I mean that. Honest intelligent industry backing rank and wealth! That makes a nation strong. Look at England!"

Mr. Barrett observed him stand out largely, as if filled by the spirit of the big drum.

That instrument now gave a final flourish and bang whereat Sound, as if knocked on the head, died languishingly.

And behold, a spokesman was seen in relief upon a background of grins, that were oddly intermixed with countenances of extraordinary solemnity.

The same commenced his propitiatory remarks by assuring the proprietor of Brookfield that he, the spokesman, and every man present, knew they had taken a liberty in coming upon Squire Pole's grounds without leave or warning. They knew likewise that Squire Pole excused them.

Chorus of shouts from the divining brethren.

Right glad they were to have such a gentleman as Squire Pole among them: and if nobody gave him a welcome last year, that was not the fault of the Yellow-and-Blues. Eh, my boys?

Groans and cheers.

Right sure was spokesman that Squire Pole was the friend of the poor man, and liked nothing better than to see him enjoy his holiday. As why shouldn't he enjoy his holiday now and then, and have a bit of relaxation as well as other men?

Acquiescent token on the part of the new dignitary, Squire Pole.

Spokesman was hereby encouraged to put it boldly, whether a man was not a man all the world over.

"For a' that!" was sung out by some rare bookworm to rearward: but no Scot being present, no frenzy followed the quotation.

It was announced that the Club had come to do homage to Squire Pole and ladies: the Junction Club of Ipley and Hillford. What did Junction mean? Junction meant Harmony. Harmonious they were, to be sure: so they joined to good purpose.

Mr. Barrett sought Emilia's eyes smilingly, but she was intent on the proceedings.

A cry of "Bundle o' sticks, Tom Breeks. Don't let slip 'bout bundle o' sticks," pulled spokesman up short. He turned hurriedly to say, "All right," and inflated his chest to do justice to the illustration of the faggots of Aesop: but Mr. Tom Breeks had either taken in too much air, or the ale that had hitherto successfully prompted him was antipathetic to the nice delicacy of an apologue; for now his arm began to work and his forehead had to be mopped, and he lashed the words "Union and Harmony" right and left, until, coming on a sentence that sounded in his ears like the close of his speech, he stared ahead, with a dim idea that he had missed a point. "Bundle o' sticks," lustily shouted, revived his apprehension; but the sole effect was to make him look on the ground and lift his hat on the point of a perplexed finger. He could not conceive how the bundle of sticks was to be brought in now; or what to say concerning them. Union and Harmony:—what more could be said? Mr. Tom Breeks tried a remonstrance with his backers. He declared to them that he had finished, and had brought in the Bundle. They replied that they had not heard it; that the Bundle was the foundation—sentiment of the Club; the first toast, after the Crown; and that he must go on until the Bundle had been brought in. Hereat, the unhappy man faced Squire Pole again. It was too abject a position for an Englishman to endure. Tom Breeks cast his hat to earth. "I'm dashed if I can bring in the bundle!"

There was no telling how conduct like this might have been received by the Yellow-and-Blues if Mr. Barrett had not spoken. "You mean everything when you say 'Union,' and you're quite right not to be tautological. You can't give such a blow with your fingers as you can with your fists, can you?"

Up went a score of fists. "We've the fists: we've the fists," was shouted.

Cornelia, smiling on Mr. Barrett, asked him why he had confused the poor people with the long word "tautological."

"I threw it as a bone," said he. "I think you will observe that they are already quieter. They are reflecting on what it signifies, and will by-and-by quarrel as to the spelling of it. At any rate it occupies them."

Cornelia laughed inwardly, and marked with pain that his own humour gave him no merriment.

At the subsiding of the echoes that coupled Squire Pole and the Junction Club together, Squire Pole replied. He wished them well. He was glad to see them, and sorry he had not ale enough on the premises to regale every man of them. Clubs were great institutions. One fist was stronger

than a thousand fingers—"as my friend here said just now." Hereat the eyelids of Cornelia shed another queenly smile on the happy originator of the remark.

Squire Pole then descended to business. He named the amount of his donation. At this practical sign of his support, heaven heard the gratitude of the good fellows. The drum awoke from its torpor, and summoned its brethren of the band to give their various versions of the National Anthem.

"Can't they be stopped?" Emilia murmured, clenching her little hands.

The patriotic melody, delivered in sturdy democratic fashion, had to be endured. It died hard, but did come to an end, piecemeal. Tom Breeks then retired from the front, and became a unit once more. There were flourishes that indicated a termination of the proceedings, when another fellow was propelled in advance, and he, shuffling and ducking his head, to the cries of "Out wi' it, Jim!" and, "Where's your stomach?" came still further forward, and showed a most obsequious grin.

"Why, it's Jim!" exclaimed Emilia, on whom Jim's eyes were fastened. Stepping nearer, she said, "Do you want to speak to me?"

Jim had this to say: which, divested of his petition for pardon on the strength of his perfect knowledge that he took a liberty, was, that the young lady had promised, while staying at Wilson's farm, that she would sing to the Club-fellows on the night of their feast.

"I towl'd 'em they'd have a rare treat, miss," mumbled Jim, "and they're all right mad for 't, that they be—bain't ye, boys?"

That they were! with not a few of the gesticulations of madness too.

Emilia said: "I promised I would sing to them. I remember it quite well. Of course I will keep my promise."

A tumult of acclamation welcomed her words, and Jim looked immensely delighted.

She was informed by several voices that they were the Yellow-and-Blues, and not the Blues: that she must not go to the wrong set: and that their booth was on Ipley Common: and that they, the Junction Club, only would honour her rightly for the honour she was going to do them: all of which Emilia said she would bear in mind.

Jim then retired hastily, having done something that stout morning ale would alone have qualified him to perform. The drum, in the noble belief that it was leading, announced the return march, and with three cheers for Squire Pole, and a crowning one for the ladies, away trooped the procession.

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