

## **CHAPTER XLVIII.**

Even in the welcome retirement of the school-room, Mr. Gallilee's mind was not at ease. He was troubled by a question entirely new to him--the question of himself, in the character of husband and father.

Accustomed through long years of conjugal association to look up to his wife as a superior creature, he was now conscious that her place in his estimation had been lost, beyond recovery. If he considered next what ought to be done with Maria and Zo, he only renewed his perplexity and distress. To leave them (as he had hitherto left them) absolutely submitted to their mother's authority, was to resign his children to the influence of a woman, who had ceased to be the object of his confidence and respect. He pondered over it in the schoolroom; he pondered over it when he went to bed. On the next morning, he arrived at a conclusion in the nature of a compromise. He decided on applying to his good friend, Mr. Mool, for a word of advice.

His first proceeding was to call at Teresa's lodgings, in the hope of hearing better news of Carmina.

The melancholy report of her was expressed in two words: No change. He was so distressed that he asked to see the landlady; and tried, in his own helpless kindhearted way, to get a little hopeful information by asking questions--useless questions, repeated over and over again in futile changes of words. The landlady was patient: she respected the undisguised grief of the gentle modest old man; but she held to the hard truth. The one possible answer was the answer which her servant had already given. When she followed him out, to open the door, Mr. Gallilee requested permission to wait a moment in the hall. "If you will allow me, ma'am, I'll wipe my eyes before I go into the street."

Arriving at the office without an appointment, he found the lawyer engaged. A clerk presented to him a slip of paper, with a line written by Mr. Mool: "Is it anything of importance?" Simple Mr. Gallilee wrote back: "Oh, dear, no; it's only me! I'll call again." Besides his critical judgment in the matter of champagne, this excellent man possessed another accomplishment--a beautiful handwriting. Mr. Mool, discovering a crooked line and some ill-formed letters in the reply, drew his own conclusions. He sent word to his old friend to wait.

In ten minutes more they were together, and the lawyer was informed of the

events that had followed the visit of Benjulia to Fairfield Gardens, on the previous day.

For a while, the two men sat silently meditating--daunted by the prospect before them. When the time came for speaking, they exercised an influence over each other, of which both were alike unconscious. Out of their common horror of Mrs. Gallilee's conduct, and their common interest in Carmina, they innocently achieved between them the creation of one resolute man.

"My dear Gallilee, this is a very serious thing."

"My dear Mool, I feel it so--or I shouldn't have disturbed you."

"Don't talk of disturbing me! I see so many complications ahead of us, I hardly know where to begin."

"Just my case! It's a comfort to me that you feel it as I do."

Mr. Mool rose and tried walking up and down his room, as a means of stimulating his ingenuity.

"There's this poor young lady," he resumed. "If she gets better--"

"Don't put it in that way!" Mr. Gallilee interposed. "It sounds as if you doubted her ever getting well--you see it yourself in that light, don't you? Be a little more positive, Mool, in mercy to me."

"By all means," Mr. Mool agreed. "Let us say, when she gets better. But the difficulty meets us, all the same. If Mrs. Gallilee claims her right, what are we to do?"

Mr. Gallilee rose in his turn, and took a walk up and down the room. That well-meant experiment only left him feebler than ever.

"What possessed her brother to make her Carmina's guardian?" he asked--with the nearest approach to irritability of which he was capable.

The lawyer was busy with his own thoughts. He only enlightened Mr. Gallilee after the question had been repeated.

"I had the sincerest regard for Mr. Robert Graywell," he said. "A better husband and father--and don't let me forget it, a more charming artist--never lived. But," said Mr. Mool, with the air of one strong-minded man

appealing to another: "weak, sadly weak. If you will allow me to say so, your wife's self-asserting way--well, it was so unlike her brother's way, that it had its effect on him! If Lady Northlake had been a little less quiet and retiring, the matter might have ended in a very different manner. As it was (I don't wish to put the case offensively) Mrs. Gallilee imposed on him--and there she is, in authority, under the Will. Let that be. We must protect this poor girl. We must act!" cried Mr. Mool with a burst of energy.

"We must act!" Mr. Gallilee repeated--and feebly clenched his fist, and softly struck the table.

"I think I have an idea," the lawyer proceeded; "suggested by something said to me by Miss Carmina herself. May I ask if you are in her confidence?"

Mr. Gallilee's face brightened at this. "Certainly," he answered. "I always kiss her when we say good-night, and kiss her again when we say good-morning."

This proof of his friend's claims as Carmina's chosen adviser, seemed rather to surprise Mr. Mool. "Did she ever hint at an idea of hastening her marriage?" he inquired.

Plainly as the question was put, it thoroughly puzzled Mr. Gallilee. His honest face answered for him--he was not in Carmina's confidence. Mr. Mool returned to his idea.

"The one thing we can do," he said, "is to hasten Mr. Ovid's return. There is the only course to take--as I see it."

"Let's do it at once!" cried Mr. Gallilee.

"But tell me," Mr. Mool insisted, greedy for encouragement--"does my suggestion relieve your mind?"

"It's the first happy moment I've had to-day!" Mr. Gallilee's weak voice piped high: he was getting firmer and firmer with every word he uttered.

One of them produced a telegraph-form; the other seized a pen. "Shall we send the message in your name?" Mr. Mool asked.

If Mr. Gallilee had possessed a hundred names he would have sent them (and paid for them) all. "John Gallilee, 14 Fairfield Gardens, London, To--" There the pen stopped. Ovid was still in the wilds of Canada. The one way of

communicating with him was through the medium of the bankers at Quebec, To the bankers, accordingly, the message was sent. "Please telegraph Mr. Ovid Vere's address, the moment you know it."

When the telegram had been sent to the office, an interval of inaction followed. Mr. Gallilee's fortitude suffered a relapse. "It's a long time to wait," he said.

His friend agreed with him. Morally speaking, Mr. Mool's strength lay in points of law. No point of law appeared to be involved in the present conference: he shared Mr. Gallilee's depression of spirits. "We are quite helpless," he remarked, "till Mr. Ovid comes back. In the interval, I see no choice for Miss Carmina but to submit to her guardian; unless--" He looked hard at Mr. Gallilee, before he finished his sentence. "Unless," he resumed, "you can get over your present feeling about your wife."

"Get over it?" Mr. Gallilee repeated.

"It seems quite impossible now, I dare say," the worthy lawyer admitted. "A very painful impression has been produced on you. Naturally! naturally! But the force of habit--a married life of many years--your own kind feeling--"

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Gallilee, bewildered, impatient, almost angry.

"A little persuasion on your part, my good friend--at the interesting moment of reconciliation--might be followed by excellent results. Mrs. Gallilee might not object to waive her claims, until time has softened existing asperities. Surely, a compromise is possible, if you could only prevail on yourself to forgive your wife."

"Forgive her? I should be only too glad to forgive her!" cried Mr. Gallilee, bursting into violent agitation. "How am I to do it? Good God! Mool, how am I to do it? You didn't hear those infamous words. You didn't see that dreadful death-struck look of the poor girl. I declare to you I turn cold when I think of my wife! I can't go to her when I ought to go--I send the servants into her room. My children, too--my dear good children--it's enough to break one's heart--think of their being brought up by a mother who could say what she said, and do--What will they see, I ask you what will they see, if she gets Carmina back in the house, and treats that sweet young creature as she will treat her? There were times last night, when I thought of going away for ever--Lord knows where--and taking the girls with me. What am I talking about? I had something to say, and I don't know what it is; I don't know my

own self! There, there; I'll keep quiet. It's my poor stupid head, I suppose--hot, Mool, burning hot. Let's be reasonable. Yes, yes, yes; let's be reasonable. You're a lawyer. I said to myself, when I came here, 'I want Mool's advice.' Be a dear good fellow--set my mind at ease. Oh, my friend, my old friend, what can I do for my children?"

Amazed and distressed--utterly at a loss how to interfere to any good purpose--Mr. Mool recovered his presence of mind, the moment Mr. Gallilee appealed to him in his legal capacity. "Don't distress yourself about your children," he said kindly. "Thank God, we stand on firm ground, there."

"Do you mean it, Mool?"

"I mean it. Where your daughters are concerned, the authority is yours. Be firm, Gallilee! be firm!"

"I will! You set me the example--don't you? You're firm--eh?"

"Firm as a rock. I agree with you. For the present at least, the children must be removed."

"At once, Mool!"

"At once!" the lawyer repeated.

They had wrought each other up to the right pitch of resolution, by this time. They were almost loud enough for the clerks to hear them in the office.

"No matter what my wife may say!" Mr. Gallilee stipulated.

"No matter what she may say," Mr. Mool rejoined, "the father is master."

"And you know the law."

"And I know the law. You have only to assert yourself."

"And you have only to back me."

"For your children's sake, Gallilee!"

"Under my lawyer's advice, Mool!"

The one resolute Man was produced at last--without a flaw in him

anywhere. They were both exhausted by the effort. Mr. Mool suggested a glass of wine.

Mr. Gallilee ventured on a hint. "You don't happen to have a drop of champagne handy?" he said.

The lawyer rang for his housekeeper. In five minutes, they were pledging each other in foaming tumblers. In five minutes more, they plunged back into business. The question of the best place to which the children could be removed, was easily settled. Mr. Mool offered his own house; acknowledging modestly that it had perhaps one drawback--it was within easy reach of Mrs. Gallilee. The statement of this objection stimulated his friend's memory. Lady Northlake was in Scotland. Lady Northlake had invited Maria and Zo, over and over again, to pass the autumn with their cousins; but Mrs. Gallilee's jealousy had always contrived to find some plausible reason for refusal. "Write at once," Mr. Mool advised. "You may do it in two lines. Your wife is ill; Miss Carmina is ill; you are not able to leave London--and the children are pining for fresh air." In this sense, Mr. Gallilee wrote. He insisted on having the letter sent to the post immediately. "I know it's long before post-time," he explained. "But I want to compose my mind."

The lawyer paused, with his glass of wine at his lips. "I say! You're not hesitating already?"

"No more than you are," Mr. Gallilee answered.

"You will really send the girls away?"

"The girls shall go, on the day when Lady Northlake invites them."

"I'll make a note of that," said Mr. Mool.

He made the note; and they rose to say good-bye. Faithful Mr. Gallilee still thought of Carmina. "Do consider it again!" he said at parting. "Are you sure the law won't help her?"

"I might look at her father's Will," Mr. Mool replied.

Mr. Gallilee saw the hopeful side of this suggestion, in the brightest colours. "Why didn't you think of it before?" he asked.

Mr. Mool gently remonstrated. "Don't forget how many things I have on my mind," he said. "It only occurs to me now that the Will may give us a

remedy--if there is any open opposition to the ward's marriage engagement, on the guardian's part."

There he stopped; knowing Mrs. Gallilee's methods of opposition too well to reckon hopefully on such a result as this. But he was a merciful man--and he kept his misgivings to himself.

On the way home, Mr. Gallilee encountered his wife's maid. Marceline was dropping a letter into the pillar-post-box at the corner of the Square; she changed colour, on seeing her master. "Corresponding with her sweetheart," Mr. Gallilee concluded.

Entering the house with an unfinished cigar in his mouth, he made straight for the smoking-room--and passed his youngest daughter, below him, waiting out of sight on the kitchen stairs.

"Have you done it?" Zo whispered, when Marceline returned by the servants' entrance.

"It's safe in the post, dear. Now tell me what you saw yesterday, when you were hidden in Miss Carmina's bedroom."

The tone in which she spoke implied a confidential agreement. With honourable promptitude Zo, perched on her friend's knee, exerted her memory, and rewarded Marceline for posting her letter to Ovid.