

CHAPTER LIX.

The first trivial sound that broke the spell, was the sound of a match struck in the next room.

He rose, and groped his way to the door. Teresa had ventured upstairs, and had kindled a light. Some momentary doubt of him kept the nurse silent when he looked at her. He stammered, and stared about him confusedly, when he spoke.

"Where--where--?" He seemed to have lost his hold on his thoughts--he gave it up, and tried again. "I want to be alone," he said; recovering, for the moment, some power of expressing himself.

Teresa's first fear of him vanished. She took him by the hand like a child, and led him downstairs to his rooms. He stood silently watching her, while she lit the candles.

"When Carmina sleeps now," he asked, "does it last long?"

"Often for hours together," the nurse answered.

He said no more; he seemed to have forgotten that there was another person in the room.

She found courage in her pity for him. "Try to pray," she said, and left him.

He fell on his knees; but still the words failed him. He tried to quiet his mind by holy thoughts. No! The dumb agony in him was powerless to find relief. Only the shadows of thoughts crossed his mind; his eyes ached with a burning heat. He began to be afraid of himself. The active habits of the life that he had left, drove him out, with the instincts of an animal, into space and air. Neither knowing nor caring in what direction he turned his steps, he walked on at the top of his speed. On and on, till the crowded houses began to grow more rare--till there were gaps of open ground, on either side of him--till the moon rose behind a plantation of trees, and bathed in its melancholy light a lonely high road. He followed the road till he was tired of it, and turned aside into a winding lane. The lights and shadows, alternating with each other, soothed and pleased him. He had got the relief in exercise that had been denied him while he was in repose. He could think again; he could feel the resolution stirring in him to save that dear one, or to die with

her. Now at last, he was man enough to face the terrible necessity that confronted him, and fight the battle of Art and Love against Death. He stopped, and looked round; eager to return, and be ready for her waking. In that solitary place, there was no hope of finding a person to direct him. He turned, to go back to the high road.

At that same moment, he became conscious of the odour of tobacco wafted towards him on the calm night air. Some one was smoking in the lane.

He retraced his steps, until he reached a gate--with a barren field behind it. There was the man, whose tobacco smoke he had smelt, leaning on the gate, with his pipe in his mouth.

The moonlight fell full on Ovid's face, as he approached to ask his way. The man suddenly stood up--stared at him--and said, "Hullo! is it you or your ghost?"

His face was in shadow, but his voice answered for him. The man was Benjulia.

"Have you come to see me?" he asked.

"No."

"Won't you shake hands?"

"No."

"What's wrong?"

Ovid waited to answer until he had steadied his temper.

"I have seen Carmina," he said.

Benjulia went on with his smoking. "An interesting case, isn't it?" he remarked.

"You were called into consultation by Mr. Null," Ovid continued; "and you approved of his ignorant treatment--you, who knew better."

"I should think I did!" Benjulia rejoined.

"You deliberately encouraged an incompetent man; you let that poor girl go

on from bad to worse--for some vile end of your own."

Benjulia good-naturedly corrected him. "No, no. For an excellent end--for knowledge."

"If I fail to remedy the mischief, which is your doing, and yours alone--"

Benjulia took his pipe out of his mouth. "How do you mean to cure her?" he eagerly interposed. "Have you got a new idea?"

"If I fail," Ovid repeated, "her death lies at your door. You merciless villain--as certainly as that moon is now shining over us, your life shall answer for hers."

Astonishment--immeasurable astonishment--sealed Benjulia's lips. He looked down the lane when Ovid left him, completely stupefied. The one imaginable way of accounting for such language as he had heard--spoken by a competent member of his own profession!--presented the old familiar alternative. "Drunk or mad?" he wondered while he lit his pipe again. Walking back to the house, his old distrust of Ovid troubled him once more. He decided to call at Teresa's lodgings in a day or two, and ascertain from the landlady (and the chemist) how Carmina was being cured.

Returning to the high road, Ovid was passed by a tradesman, driving his cart towards London. The man civilly offered to take him as far as the nearest outlying cabstand.

Neither the landlady nor Teresa had gone to their beds when he returned. Their account of Carmina, during his absence, contained nothing to alarm him. He bade them goodnight--eager to be left alone in his room.

In the house and out of the house, there was now the perfect silence that helps a man to think. His mind was clear; his memory answered, when he called on it to review that part of his own medical practice which might help him, by experience, in his present need. But he shrank--with Carmina's life in his hands--from trusting wholly to himself. A higher authority than his was waiting to be consulted. He took from his portmanteau the manuscript presented to him by the poor wretch, whose last hours he had soothed in the garret at Montreal.

The work opened with a declaration which gave it a special value, in Ovid's estimation.

"If this imperfect record of experience is ever read by other eyes than mine, I wish to make one plain statement at the outset. The information which is presented in these pages is wholly derived from the results of bedside practice; pursued under miserable obstacles and interruptions, and spread over a period of many years. Whatever faults and failings I may have been guilty of as a man, I am innocent, in my professional capacity, of ever having perpetrated the useless and detestable cruelties which go by the name of Vivisection. Without entering into any of the disputes on either side, which this practice has provoked, I declare my conviction that no asserted usefulness in the end, can justify deliberate cruelty in the means. The man who seriously maintains that any pursuit in which he can engage is independent of moral restraint, is a man in a state of revolt against God. I refuse to hear him in his own defense, on that ground."

Ovid turned next to the section of the work which was entitled "Brain Disease." The writer introduced his observations in these prefatory words:

"A celebrated physiologist, plainly avowing the ignorance of doctors in the matter of the brain and its diseases, and alluding to appearances presented by post-mortem examination, concludes his confession thus: 'We cannot even be sure whether many of the changes discovered are the cause or the result of the disease, or whether the two are the conjoint results of a common cause.'

"So this man writes, after experience in Vivisection.

"Let my different experience be heard next. Not knowing into what hands this manuscript may fall, or what unexpected opportunities of usefulness it may encounter after my death, I purposely abstain from using technical language in the statement which I have now to make.

"In medical investigations, as in all other forms of human inquiry, the result in view is not infrequently obtained by indirect and unexpected means. What I have to say here on the subject of brain disease, was first suggested by experience of two cases, which seemed in the last degree unlikely to help me. They were both cases of young women; each one having been hysterically affected by a serious moral shock; terminating, after a longer or shorter interval, in simulated paralysis. One of these cases I treated successfully. While I was still in attendance on the other, (pursuing the same course of treatment which events had already proved to be right), a fatal accident terminated my patient's life, and rendered a post-mortem examination necessary. From those starting points, I arrived--by devious ways which I am now to relate--at deductions and discoveries that threw a

new light on the nature and treatment of brain disease."

Hour by hour, Ovid studied the pages that followed, until his mind and the mind of the writer were one. He then returned to certain preliminary allusions to the medical treatment of the two girls--inexpressibly precious to him, in Carmina's present interests. The dawn of day found him prepared at all points, and only waiting until the lapse of the next few hours placed the means of action in his hands.

But there was one anxiety still to be relieved, before he lay down to rest.

He took off his shoes, and stole upstairs to Carmina's door. The faithful Teresa was astir, earnestly persuading her to take some nourishment. The little that he could hear of her voice, as she answered, made his heart ache--it was so faint and so low. Still she could speak; and still there was the old saying to remember, which has comforted so many and deceived so many: While there's life, there's hope.