

CHAPTER LX.

After a brief interview with his step-son, Mr. Gallilee returned to his daughters in Scotland.

Touched by his fatherly interest in Carmina, Ovid engaged to keep him informed of her progress towards recovery. If the anticipation of saving her proved to be the sad delusion of love and hope, silence would signify what no words could say.

In ten days' time, there was a happy end to suspense. The slow process of recovery might extend perhaps to the end of the year. But, if no accident happened, Ovid had the best reasons for believing that Carmina's life was safe.

Freed from the terrible anxieties that had oppressed him, he was able to write again, a few days later, in a cheerful tone, and to occupy his pen at Mr. Gallilee's express request, with such an apparently trifling subject as the conduct of Mr. Null.

"Your old medical adviser was quite right in informing you that I had relieved him from any further attendance on Carmina. But his lively imagination (or perhaps I ought to say, his sense of his own consequence) has misled you when he also declares that I purposely insulted him. I took the greatest pains not to wound his self-esteem. He left me in anger, nevertheless.

"A day or two afterwards, I received a note from him; addressing me as 'Sir,' and asking ironically if I had any objection to his looking at the copies of my prescriptions in the chemist's book. Though he was old enough to be my father (he remarked) it seemed that experience counted for nothing; he had still something to learn from his junior, in the treatment of disease--and so on.

"At that miserable time of doubt and anxiety, I could only send a verbal reply, leaving him to do what he liked. Before I tell you of the use that he made of his liberty of action, I must confess something relating to the prescriptions themselves. Don't be afraid of long and learned words, and don't suppose that I am occupying your attention in this way, without a serious reason for it which you will presently understand.

"A note in the manuscript--to my study of which, I owe, under God, the preservation of Carmina's life--warned me that chemists, in the writer's country, had either refused to make up certain prescriptions given in the work, or had taken the liberty of altering the new quantities and combinations of some of the drugs prescribed.

"Precisely the same thing happened here, in the case of the first chemist to whom I sent. He refused to make up the medicine, unless I provided him with a signed statement taking the whole responsibility on myself.

"Having ascertained the exact nature of his objection, I dismissed him without his guarantee, and employed another chemist; taking care (in the interests of my time and my temper) to write my more important prescriptions under reserve. That is to say, I followed the conventional rules, as to quantities and combinations, and made the necessary additions or changes from my own private stores when the medicine was sent home.

"Poor foolish Mr. Null, finding nothing to astonish him in my course of medicine--as represented by the chemist--appears by his own confession, to have copied the prescriptions with a malicious object in view. 'I have sent them, (he informs me, in a second letter) to Doctor Benjulia; in order that he too may learn something in his profession from the master who has dispensed with our services.' This new effort of irony means that I stand self-condemned of vanity, in presuming to rely on my own commonplace resources--represented by the deceitful evidence of the chemist's book!

"But I am grateful to Mr. Null, notwithstanding: he has done me a service, in meaning to do me an injury.

"My imperfect prescriptions have quieted the mind of the man to whom he sent them. This wretch's distrust has long since falsely suspected me of some professional rivalry pursued in secret; the feeling showed itself again, when I met with him by accident on the night of my return to London. Since Mr. Null has communicated with him, the landlady is no longer insulted by his visits, and offended by his questions--all relating to the course of treatment which I was pursuing upstairs.

"You now understand why I have ventured to trouble you on a purely professional topic. To turn to matters of more interest--our dear Carmina is well enough to remember you, and to send her love to you and the girls. But even this little effort is followed by fatigue.

"I don't mean only fatigue of body: that is now a question of time and care. I

mean fatigue of mind--expressing itself by defect of memory.

"On the morning when the first positive change for the better appeared, I was at her bedside when she woke. She looked at me in amazement. 'Why didn't you warn me of your sudden return?' she asked, 'I have only written to you to-day--to your bankers at Quebec! What does it mean?'

"I did my best to soothe her, and succeeded. There is a complete lapse in her memory--I am only too sure of it! She has no recollection of anything that has happened since she wrote her last letter to me--a letter which must have been lost (perhaps intercepted?), or I should have received it before I left Quebec. This forgetfulness of the dreadful trials through which my poor darling has passed, is, in itself, a circumstance which we must all rejoice over for her sake. But I am discouraged by it, at the same time; fearing it may indicate some more serious injury than I have yet discovered.

"Miss Minerva--what should I do without the help and sympathy of that best of true women?--Miss Minerva has cautiously tested her memory in other directions, with encouraging results, so far. But I shall not feel easy until I have tried further experiments, by means of some person who does not exercise a powerful influence over her, and whose memory is naturally occupied with what we older people call trifles.

"When you all leave Scotland next month, bring Zo here with you. My dear little correspondent is just the sort of quaint child I want for the purpose. Kiss her for me till she is out of breath--and say that is what I mean to do when we meet."

The return to London took place in the last week in October.

Lord and Lady Northlake went to their town residence, taking Maria and Zo with them. There were associations connected with Fairfield Gardens, which made the prospect of living there--without even the society of his children--unendurable to Mr. Gallilee. Ovid's house, still waiting the return of its master, was open to his step-father. The poor man was only too glad (in his own simple language) "to keep the nest warm for his son."

The latest inquiries made at the asylum were hopefully answered. Thus far, the measures taken to restore Mrs. Gallilee to herself had succeeded beyond expectation. But one unfavourable symptom remained. She was habitually silent. When she did speak, her mind seemed to be occupied with scientific subjects: she never mentioned her husband, or any other member of the family. Time and attention would remove this drawback. In two or three

months more perhaps, if all went well, she might return to her family and her friends, as sane a woman as ever.

Calling at Fairfield Gardens for any letters that might be waiting there, Mr. Gallilee received a circular in lithographed writing; accompanied by a roll of thick white paper. The signature revealed the familiar name of Mr. Le Frank.

The circular set forth that the writer had won renown and a moderate income, as pianist and teacher of music. "A terrible accident, ladies and gentlemen, has injured my right hand, and has rendered amputation of two of my fingers necessary. Deprived for life of my professional resources, I have but one means of subsistence left--viz:---collecting subscriptions for a song of my own composition. N.B.--The mutilated musician leaves the question of terms in the hands of the art-loving public, and will do himself the honour of calling to-morrow."

Good-natured Mr. Gallilee left a sovereign to be given to the victim of circumstances--and then set forth for Lord Northlake's house. He and Ovid had arranged that Zo was to be taken to see Carmina that day.

On his way through the streets, he was met by Mr. Mool. The lawyer looked at the song under his friend's arm. "What's that you're taking such care of?" he asked. "It looks like music. A new piece for the young ladies--eh?"

Mr. Gallilee explained. Mr. Mool struck his stick on the pavement, as the nearest available means of expressing indignation.

"Never let another farthing of your money get into that rascal's pocket! It's no merit of his that the poor old Italian nurse has not made her appearance in the police reports."

With this preface, Mr. Mool related the circumstances under which Mr. Le Frank had met with his accident. "His first proceeding when they discharged him from the hospital," continued the lawyer, "was to summon Teresa before a magistrate. Fortunately she showed the summons to me. I appeared for her, provided with a plan of the rooms which spoke for itself; and I put two questions to the complainant. What business had he in another person's room? and why was his hand in that other person's cupboard? The reporter kindly left the case unrecorded; and when the fellow ended by threatening the poor woman outside the court, we bound him over to keep the peace. I have my eye on him--and I'll catch him yet, under the Vagrant Act!"