

## Chapter XXXII

In all ages it hath been a favorite text that a potent love hath the nature of an isolated fatality, whereto the mind's opinions and wonted resolves are altogether alien; as, for example, Daphnis his frenzy, wherein it had little availed him to have been convinced of Heraclitus his doctrine; or the philtre-bred passion of Tristan, who, though he had been as deep as Duns Scotus, would have had his reasoning marred by that cup too much; or Romeo in his sudden taking for Juliet, wherein any objections he might have held against Ptolemy had made little difference to his discourse under the balcony. Yet all love is not such, even though potent; nay, this passion hath as large scope as any for allying itself with every operation of the soul: so that it shall acknowledge an effect from the imagined light of unproven firmaments, and have its scale set to the grander orbits of what hath been and shall be.

Deronda, on his return to town, could assure Sir Hugo of his having lodged in Grandcourt's mind a distinct understanding that he could get fifty thousand pounds by giving up a prospect which was probably distant, and not absolutely certain; but he had no further sign of Grandcourt's disposition in the matter than that he was evidently inclined to keep up friendly communications.

'And what did you think of the future bride on a nearer survey?' said Sir Hugo.

'I thought better of her than I did in Leubronn. Roulette was not a good setting for her; it brought out something of the demon. At Dinlow she seemed much more womanly and attractive - less hard and self-possessed. I thought her mouth and eyes had quite a different expression.'

'Don't flirt with her too much, Dan,' said Sir Hugo, meaning to be agreeably playful. 'If you make Grandcourt savage when they come to the Abbey at Christmas, it will interfere with my affairs.'

'I can stay in town, sir.'

'No, no. Lady Mallinger and the children can't do without you at Christmas. Only don't make mischief - unless you can get up a duel, and manage to shoot Grandcourt, which might be worth a little inconvenience.'

'I don't think you ever saw me flirt,' said Deronda, not amused.

'Oh, haven't I, though?' said Sir Hugo, provokingly. 'You are always looking tenderly at the women, and talking to them in a Jesuitical

way. You are a dangerous young fellow - a kind of Lovelace who will make the Clarissas run after you instead of you running after them.'

What was the use of being exasperated at a tasteless joke? - only the exasperation comes before the reflection on utility. Few friendly remarks are more annoying than the information that we are always seeming to do what we never mean to do. Sir Hugo's notion of flirting, it was to be hoped, was rather peculiar; for his own part, Deronda was sure that he had never flirted. But he was glad that the baronet had no knowledge about the repurchase of Gwendolen's necklace to feed his taste for this kind of rallying.

He would be on his guard in future; for example, in his behavior at Mrs. Meyrick's, where he was about to pay his first visit since his arrival from Leubronn. For Mirah was certainly a creature in whom it was difficult not to show a tender kind of interest both by looks and speech.

Mrs. Meyrick had not failed to send Deronda a report of Mirah's well-being in her family. 'We are getting fonder of her every day,' she had written. 'At breakfast-time we all look toward the door with expectation to see her come in; and we watch her and listen to her as if she were a native from a new country. I have not heard a word from her lips that gives me a doubt about her. She is quite contented and full of gratitude. My daughters are learning from her, and they hope to get her other pupils; for she is anxious not to eat the bread of idleness, but to work, like my girls. Mab says our life has become like a fairy tale, and all she is afraid of is that Mirah will turn into a nightingale again and fly away from us. Her voice is just perfect: not loud and strong, but searching and melting, like the thoughts of what has been. That is the way old people like me feel a beautiful voice.'

But Mrs. Meyrick did not enter into particulars which would have required her to say that Amy and Mab, who had accompanied Mirah to the synagogue, found the Jewish faith less reconcilable with their wishes in her case than in that of Scott's Rebecca. They kept silence out of delicacy to Mirah, with whom her religion was too tender a subject to be touched lightly; but after a while Amy, who was much of a practical reformer, could not restrain a question.

'Excuse me, Mirah, but *does* it seem quite right to you that the women should sit behind rails in a gallery apart?'

'Yes, I never thought of anything else,' said Mirah, with mild surprise.

'And you like better to see the men with their hats on?' said Mab, cautiously proposing the smallest item of difference.

'Oh, yes. I like what I have always seen there, because it brings back to me the same feelings - the feelings I would not part with for anything else in the world.'

After this, any criticism, whether of doctrine or practice, would have seemed to these generous little people an inhospitable cruelty. Mirah's religion was of one fibre with her affections, and had never presented itself to her as a set of propositions.

'She says herself she is a very bad Jewess, and does not half know her people's religion,' said Amy, when Mirah was gone to bed. 'Perhaps it would gradually melt away from her, and she would pass into Christianity like the rest of the world, if she got to love us very much, and never found her mother. It is so strange to be of the Jews' religion now.'

'Oh, oh, oh!' cried Mab. 'I wish I were not such a hideous Christian. How can an ugly Christian, who is always dropping her work, convert a beautiful Jewess, who has not a fault?'

'It may be wicked of me,' said shrewd Kate, 'but I cannot help wishing that her mother may not be found. There might be something unpleasant.'

'I don't think it, my dear,' said Mrs. Meyrick. 'I believe Mirah is cut out after the pattern of her mother. And what a joy it would be to her to have such a daughter brought back again! But a mother's feelings are not worth reckoning, I suppose' (she shot a mischievous glance at her own daughters), 'and a dead mother is worth more than a living one?'

'Well, and so she may be, little mother,' said Kate; 'but we would rather hold you cheaper, and have you alive.'

Not only the Meyricks, whose various knowledge had been acquired by the irregular foraging to which clever girls have usually been reduced, but Deronda himself, with all his masculine instruction, had been roused by this apparition of Mirah to the consciousness of knowing hardly anything about modern Judaism or the inner Jewish history. The Chosen People have been commonly treated as a people chosen for the sake of somebody else; and their thinking as something (no matter exactly what) that ought to have been entirely otherwise; and Deronda, like his neighbors, had regarded Judaism as a sort of eccentric fossilized form which an accomplished man might dispense with studying, and leave to specialists. But Mirah, with her terrified flight from one parent, and her yearning after the other, had flashed on him the hitherto neglected reality that Judaism was something still throbbing in human lives, still making for them the only conceivable

vesture of the world; and in the idling excursion on which he immediately afterward set out with Sir Hugo he began to look for the outsides of synagogues, and the title of books about the Jews. This awakening of a new interest - this passing from the supposition that we hold the right opinions on a subject we are careless about, to a sudden care for it, and a sense that our opinions were ignorance - is an effectual remedy for *ennui*, which, unhappily, cannot be secured on a physician's prescription; but Deronda had carried it with him, and endured his weeks of lounging all the better. It was on this journey that he first entered a Jewish synagogue - at Frankfort - where his party rested on a Friday. In exploring the Juden-gasse, which he had seen long before, he remembered well enough its picturesque old houses; what his eyes chiefly dwelt on now were the human types there; and his thought, busily connecting them with the past phases of their race, stirred that fibre of historic sympathy which had helped to determine in him certain traits worth mentioning for those who are interested in his future. True, when a young man has a fine person, no eccentricity of manners, the education of a gentleman, and a present income, it is not customary to feel a prying curiosity about his way of thinking, or his peculiar tastes. He may very well be settled in life as an agreeable clever young fellow without passing a special examination on those heads. Later, when he is getting rather slovenly and portly, his peculiarities are more distinctly discerned, and it is taken as a mercy if they are not highly objectionable. But any one wishing to understand the effect of after- events on Deronda should know a little more of what he was at five-and- twenty than was evident in ordinary intercourse.

It happened that the very vividness of his impressions had often made him the more enigmatic to his friends, and had contributed to an apparent indefiniteness in his sentiments. His early-wakened sensibility and reflectiveness had developed into a many-sided sympathy, which threatened to hinder any persistent course of action: as soon as he took up any antagonism, though only in thought, he seemed to himself like the Sabine warriors in the memorable story - with nothing to meet his spear but flesh of his flesh, and objects that he loved. His imagination had so wrought itself to the habit of seeing things as they probably appeared to others, that a strong partisanship, unless it were against an immediate oppression, had become an insincerity for him. His plenteous, flexible sympathy had ended by falling into one current with that reflective analysis which tends to neutralize sympathy. Few men were able to keep themselves clearer of vices than he; yet he hated vices mildly, being used to think of them less in the abstract than as a part of mixed human natures having an individual history, which it was the bent of his mind to trace with understanding and pity. With the same innate balance he was fervidly democratic in his feeling for the multitude, and yet, through his affections and imagination, intensely conservative;

voracious of speculations on government and religion, yet both to part with long- sanctioned forms which, for him, were quick with memories and sentiments that no argument could lay dead. We fall on the leaning side; and Deronda suspected himself of loving too well the losing causes of the world. Martyrdom changes sides, and he was in danger of changing with it, having a strong repugnance to taking up that clue of success which the order of the world often forces upon us and makes it treason against the common weal to reject. And yet his fear of falling into an unreasoning narrow hatred made a check for him: he apologized for the heirs of privilege; he shrank with dislike from the loser's bitterness and the denunciatory tone of the unaccepted innovator. A too reflective and diffusive sympathy was in danger of paralyzing in him that indignation against wrong and that selectness of fellowship which are the conditions of moral force; and in the last few years of confirmed manhood he had become so keenly aware of this that what he most longed for was either some external event, or some inward light, that would urge him into a definite line of action, and compress his wandering energy. He was ceasing to care for knowledge - he had no ambition for practice - unless they could both be gathered up into one current with his emotions; and he dreaded, as if it were a dwelling- place of lost souls, that dead anatomy of culture which turns the universe into a mere ceaseless answer to queries, and knows, not everything, but everything else about everything - as if one should be ignorant of nothing concerning the scent of violets except the scent itself for which one had no nostril. But how and whence was the needed event to come? - the influence that would justify partiality, and make him what he longed to be, yet was unable to make himself - an organic part of social life, instead of roaming in it like a yearning disembodied spirit, stirred with a vague social passion, but without fixed local habitation to render fellowship real? To make a little difference for the better was what he was not contented to live without; but how to make it? It is one thing to see your road, another to cut it. He found some of the fault in his birth and the way he had been brought up, which had laid no special demands on him and had given him no fixed relationship except one of a doubtful kind; but he did not attempt to hide from himself that he had fallen into a meditative numbness, and was gliding farther and farther from that life of practically energetic sentiment which he would have proclaimed (if he had been inclined to proclaim anything) to be the best of all life, and for himself the only way worth living. He wanted some way of keeping emotion and its progeny of sentiments - which make the savors of life - substantial and strong in the face of a reflectiveness that threatened to nullify all differences. To pound the objects of sentiment into small dust, yet keep sentiment alive and active, was something like the famous recipe for making cannon - to first take a round hole and then enclose it with iron; whatever you do keeping fast hold of your round hole. Yet how distinguish what our

will may wisely save in its completeness, from the heaping of cat-mummies and the expensive cult of enshrined putrefactions?

Something like this was the common under-current in Deronda's mind while he was reading law or imperfectly attending to polite conversation. Meanwhile he had not set about one function in particular with zeal and steadiness. Not an admirable experience, to be proposed as an ideal; but a form of struggle before break of day which some young men since the patriarch have had to pass through, with more or less of bruising if not laming.

I have said that under his calm exterior he had a fervor which made him easily feel the presence of poetry in everyday events; and the forms of the Juden-gasse, rousing the sense of union with what is remote, set him musing on two elements of our historic life which that sense raises into the same region of poetry; - the faint beginnings of faiths and institutions, and their obscure lingering decay; the dust and withered remnants with which they are apt to be covered, only enhancing for the awakened perception the impressiveness either of a sublimely penetrating life, as in the twin green leaves that will become the sheltering tree, or of a pathetic inheritance in which all the grandeur and the glory have become a sorrowing memory.

This imaginative stirring, as he turned out of the Juden-gasse, and continued to saunter in the warm evening air, meaning to find his way to the synagogue, neutralized the repellent effect of certain ugly little incidents on his way. Turning into an old book-shop to ask the exact time of service at the synagogue, he was affectionately directed by a precocious Jewish youth, who entered cordially into his wanting, not the fine new building of the Reformed but the old Rabbinical school of the orthodox; and then cheated him like a pure Teuton, only with more amenity, in his charge for a book quite out of request as one 'nicht so leicht zu bekommen.' Meanwhile at the opposite counter a deaf and grisly tradesman was casting a flinty look at certain cards, apparently combining advantages of business with religion, and shoutingly proposed to him in Jew-dialect by a dingy man in a tall coat hanging from neck to heel, a bag in hand, and a broad low hat surmounting his chosen nose - who had no sooner disappeared than another dingy man of the same pattern issued from the background glooms of the shop and also shouted in the same dialect. In fact, Deronda saw various queer-looking Israelites not altogether without guile, and just distinguishable from queer-looking Christians of the same mixed *morale*. In his anxiety about Mirah's relatives, he had lately been thinking of vulgar Jews with a sort of personal alarm. But a little comparison will often diminish our surprise and disgust at the aberrations of Jews and other dissidents whose lives do not offer a consistent or lovely pattern of their creed; and this evening Deronda, becoming more conscious that he was falling into unfairness and

ridiculous exaggeration, began to use that corrective comparison: he paid his thaler too much, without prejudice to his interests in the Hebrew destiny, or his wish to find the *Rabbinische Schule*, which he arrived at by sunset, and entered with a good congregation of men.

He happened to take his seat in a line with an elderly man from whom he was distant enough to glance at him more than once as rather a noticeable figure - his ample white beard and felt hat framing a profile of that fine contour which may as easily be Italian as Hebrew. He returned Deronda's notice till at last their eyes met; an undesirable chance with unknown persons, and a reason to Deronda for not looking again; but he immediately found an open prayer-book pushed toward him and had to bow his thanks. However, the congregation had mustered, the reader had mounted to the *almemor* or platform, and the service began. Deronda, having looked enough at the German translation of the Hebrew in the book before him to know that he was chiefly hearing Psalms and Old Testament passages or phrases, gave himself up to that strongest effect of chanted liturgies which is independent of detailed verbal meaning - like the effect of an Allegri's *Miserere* or a Palestrina's *Magnificat*. The most powerful movement of feeling with a liturgy is the prayer which seeks for nothing special, but is a yearning to escape from the limitations of our own weakness and an invocation of all Good to enter and abide with us; or else a self-oblivious lifting up of Gladness, a *Gloria in excelsis* that such Good exists; both the yearning and the exaltation gathering their utmost force from the sense of communion in a form which has expressed them both, for long generations of struggling fellow-men. The Hebrew liturgy, like others, has its transitions of litany, lyric, proclamation, dry statement and blessing; but this evening, all were one for Deronda: the chant of the *Chazaris* or Reader's grand wide-ranging voice with its passage from monotony to sudden cries, the outburst of sweet boys' voices from the little choir, the devotional swaying of men's bodies backward and forward, the very commonness of the building and shabbiness of the scene where a national faith, which had penetrated the thinking of half the world, and moulded the splendid forms of that world's religion, was finding a remote, obscure echo - all were blent for him as one expression of a binding history, tragic and yet glorious. He wondered at the strength of his own feeling; it seemed beyond the occasion - what one might imagine to be a divine influx in the darkness, before there was any vision to interpret. The whole scene was a coherent strain, its burden a passionate regret, which, if he had known the liturgy for the Day of Reconciliation, he might have clad in its authentic burden; 'Happy the eye which saw all these things; but verily to hear only of them afflicts our soul. Happy the eye that saw our temple and the joy of our congregation; but verily to hear only of them afflicts our soul. Happy the eye that saw the fingers when tuning every kind of song; but verily to hear only of them afflicts our soul.'

But with the cessation of the devotional sounds and the movement of many indifferent faces and vulgar figures before him there darted into his mind the frigid idea that he had probably been alone in his feeling, and perhaps the only person in the congregation for whom the service was more than a dull routine. There was just time for this chilling thought before he had bowed to his civil neighbor and was moving away with the rest - when he felt a hand on his arm, and turning with the rather unpleasant sensation which this abrupt sort of claim is apt to bring, he saw close to him the white-bearded face of that neighbor, who said to him in German, 'Excuse me, young gentleman - allow me - what is your parentage - your mother's family - her maiden name?'

Deronda had a strongly resistant feeling: he was inclined to shake off hastily the touch on his arm; but he managed to slip it away and said coldly, 'I am an Englishman.'

The questioner looked at him dubiously still for an instant, then just lifted his hat and turned away; whether under a sense of having made a mistake or of having been repulsed, Deronda was uncertain. In his walk back to the hotel he tried to still any uneasiness on the subject by reflecting that he could not have acted differently. How could he say that he did not know the name of his mother's family to that total stranger? - who indeed had taken an unwarrantable liberty in the abruptness of his question, dictated probably by some fancy of likeness such as often occurs without real significance. The incident, he said to himself, was trivial; but whatever import it might have, his inward shrinking on the occasion was too strong for him to be sorry that he had cut it short. It was a reason, however, for his not mentioning the synagogue to the Mallingers - in addition to his usual inclination to reticence on anything that the baronet would have been likely to call Quixotic enthusiasm. Hardly any man could be more good-natured than Sir Hugo; indeed in his kindness especially to women, he did actions which others would have called romantic; but he never took a romantic view of them, and in general smiled at the introduction of motives on a grand scale, or of reasons that lay very far off. This was the point of strongest difference between him and Deronda, who rarely ate at breakfast without some silent discursive flight after grounds for filling up his day according to the practice of his contemporaries.

This halt at Frankfort was taken on their way home, and its impressions were kept the more actively vibrating in him by the duty of caring for Mirah's welfare. That question about his parentage, which if he had not both inwardly and outwardly shaken it off as trivial, would have seemed a threat rather than a promise of revelation, and reinforced his anxiety as to the effect of finding Mirah's relatives and his resolve to proceed with caution. If he made any unpleasant discovery, was he bound to a disclosure that might cast a



new net of trouble around her? He had written to Mrs. Meyrick to announce his visit at four o'clock, and he found Mirah seated at work with only Mrs. Meyrick and Mab, the open piano, and all the glorious company of engravings. The dainty neatness of her hair and dress, the glow of tranquil happiness in a face where a painter need have changed nothing if he had wanted to put it in front of the host singing 'peace on earth and good will to men,' made a contrast to his first vision of her that was delightful to Deronda's eyes. Mirah herself was thinking of it, and immediately on their greeting said -

'See how different I am from the miserable creature by the river! all because you found me and brought me to the very best.'

'It was my good chance to find you,' said Deronda. 'Any other man would have been glad to do what I did.'

'That is not the right way to be thinking about it,' said Mirah, shaking her head with decisive gravity, 'I think of what really was. It was you, and not another, who found me and were good to me.'

'I agree with Mirah,' said Mrs. Meyrick. 'Saint Anybody is a bad saint to pray to.'

'Besides, Anybody could not have brought me to you,' said Mirah, smiling at Mrs. Meyrick. 'And I would rather be with you than with any one else in the world except my mother. I wonder if ever a poor little bird, that was lost and could not fly, was taken and put into a warm nest where was a mother and sisters who took to it so that everything came naturally, as if it had been always there. I hardly thought before that the world could ever be as happy and without fear as it is to me now.' She looked meditative a moment, and then said, 'sometimes I am a *little* afraid.'

'What is it you are afraid of?' said Deronda with anxiety.

'That when I am turning at the corner of a street I may meet my father. It seems dreadful that I should be afraid of meeting him. That is my only sorrow,' said Mirah, plaintively.

'It is surely not very probable,' said Deronda, wishing that it were less so; then, not to let the opportunity escape - 'Would it be a great grief to you now if you were never to meet your mother?'

She did not answer immediately, but meditated again, with her eyes fixed on the opposite wall. Then she turned them on Deronda and said firmly, as if she had arrived at the exact truth, 'I want her to know that I have always loved her, and if she is alive I want to comfort her. She may be dead. If she were I should long to know where she was

buried; and to know whether my brother lives, so that we can remember her together. But I will try not to grieve. I have thought much for so many years of her being dead. And I shall have her with me in my mind, as I have always had. We can never be really parted. I think I have never sinned against her. I have always tried not to do what would hurt her. Only, she might be sorry that I was not a good Jewess.'

'In what way are you not a good Jewess?' said Deronda.

'I am ignorant, and we never observed the laws, but lived among Christians just as they did. But I have heard my father laugh at the strictness of the Jews about their food and all customs, and their not liking Christians. I think my mother was strict; but she could never want me not to like those who are better to me than any of my own people I have ever known. I think I could obey in other things that she wished but not in that. It is so much easier to me to share in love than in hatred. I remember a play I read in German - since I have been here it has come into my mind - where the heroine says something like that.'

'Antigone,' said Deronda.

'Ah, you know it. But I do not believe that my mother would wish me not to love my best friends. She would be grateful to them.' Here Mirah had turned to Mrs. Meyrick, and with a sudden lighting up of her whole countenance, she said, 'Oh, if we ever do meet and know each other as we are now, so that I could tell what would comfort her - I should be so full of blessedness my soul would know no want but to love her!'

'God bless you, child!' said Mrs. Meyrick, the words escaping involuntarily from her motherly heart. But to relieve the strain of feeling she looked at Deronda and said, 'It is curious that Mirah, who remembers her mother so well it is as if she saw her, cannot recall her brother the least bit - except the feeling of having been carried by him when she was tired, and of his being near her when she was in her mother's lap. It must be that he was rarely at home. He was already grown up. It is a pity her brother should be quite a stranger to her.'

'He is good; I feel sure Ezra is good,' said Mirah, eagerly. 'He loved my mother - he would take care of her. I remember more of him than that. I remember my mother's voice once calling, 'Ezra!' and then his answering from a distance 'Mother!' - Mirah had changed her voice a little in each of these words and had given them a loving intonation - 'and then he came close to us. I feel sure he is good. I have always taken comfort from that.'

It was impossible to answer this either with agreement or doubt. Mrs. Meyrick and Deronda exchanged a quick glance: about this brother she felt as painfully dubious as he did. But Mirah went on, absorbed in her memories -

'Is it not wonderful how I remember the voices better than anything else? I think they must go deeper into us than other things. I have often fancied heaven might be made of voices.'

'Like your singing - yes,' said Mab, who had hitherto kept a modest silence, and now spoke bashfully, as was her wont in the presence of Prince Camaralzaman - 'Ma, do ask Mirah to sing. Mr Deronda has not heard her.'

'Would it be disagreeable to you to sing now?' said Deronda, with a more deferential gentleness than he had ever been conscious of before.

'Oh, I shall like it,' said Mirah. 'My voice has come back a little with rest.'

Perhaps her ease of manner was due to something more than the simplicity of her nature. The circumstances of her life made her think of everything she did as work demanded from her, in which affectation had nothing to do; and she had begun her work before self-consciousness was born.

She immediately rose and went to the piano - a somewhat worn instrument that seemed to get the better of its infirmities under the firm touch of her small fingers as she preluded. Deronda placed himself where he could see her while she sang; and she took everything as quietly as if she had been a child going to breakfast.

Imagine her - it is always good to imagine a human creature in whom bodily loveliness seems as properly one with the entire being as the bodily loveliness of those wondrous transparent orbs of life that we find in the sea - imagine her with her dark hair brushed from her temples, but yet showing certain tiny rings there which had cunningly found their own way back, the mass of it hanging behind just to the nape of the little neck in curly fibres, such as renew themselves at their own will after being bathed into straightness like that of water-grasses. Then see the perfect cameo her profile makes, cut in a duskish shell, where by some happy fortune there pierced a gem-like darkness for the eye and eyebrow; the delicate nostrils defined enough to be ready for sensitive movements, the finished ear, the firm curves of the chin and neck, entering into the expression of a refinement which was not feebleness.

She sang Beethoven's 'Per pieta non dirmi addio' with a subdued but searching pathos which had that essential of perfect singing, the making one oblivious of art or manner, and only possessing one with the song. It was the sort of voice that gives the impression of being meant like a bird's wooing for an audience near and beloved. Deronda began by looking at her, but felt himself presently covering his eyes with his hand, wanting to seclude the melody in darkness; then he refrained from what might seem oddity, and was ready to meet the look of mute appeal which she turned toward him at the end.

'I think I never enjoyed a song more than that,' he said, gratefully.

'You like my singing? I am so glad,' she said, with a smile of delight. 'It has been a great pain to me, because it failed in what it was wanted for. But now we think I can use it to get my bread. I have really been taught well. And now I have two pupils, that Miss Meyrick found for me. They pay me nearly two crowns for their two lessons.'

'I think I know some ladies who would find you many pupils after Christmas,' said Deronda. 'You would not mind singing before any one who wished to hear you?'

'Oh no, I want to do something to get money. I could teach reading and speaking, Mrs. Meyrick thinks. But if no one would learn of me, that is difficult.' Mirah smiled with a touch of merriment he had not seen in her before. 'I dare say I should find her poor - I mean my mother. I should want to get money for her. And I can not always live on charity; though' - here she turned so as to take all three of her companions in one glance - 'it is the sweetest charity in all the world.'

'I should think you can get rich,' said Deronda, smiling. 'Great ladies will perhaps like you to teach their daughters, We shall see. But now do sing again to us.'

She went on willingly, singing with ready memory various things by Gordigiani and Schubert; then, when she had left the piano, Mab said, entreatingly, 'Oh, Mirah, if you would not mind singing the little hymn.'

'It is too childish,' said Mirah. 'It is like lisping.'

'What is the hymn?' said Deronda.

'It is the Hebrew hymn she remembers her mother singing over her when she lay in her cot,' said Mrs. Meyrick.

'I should like very much to hear it,' said Deronda, 'if you think I am worthy to hear what is so sacred.'

'I will sing it if you like,' said Mirah, 'but I don't sing real words - only here and there a syllable like hers - the rest is lisping. Do you know Hebrew? because if you do, my singing will seem childish nonsense.'

Deronda shook his head. 'It will be quite good Hebrew to me.'

Mirah crossed her little feet and hands in her easiest attitude, and then lifted up her head at an angle which seemed to be directed to some invisible face bent over her, while she sang a little hymn of quaint melancholy intervals, with syllables that really seemed childish lisping to her audience; the voice in which she gave it forth had gathered even a sweeter, more cooing tenderness than was heard in her other songs.

'If I were ever to know the real words, I should still go on in my old way with them,' said Mirah, when she had repeated the hymn several times.

'Why not?' said Deronda. 'The lisped syllables are very full of meaning.'

'Yes, indeed,' said Mrs. Meyrick. 'A mother hears something of a lisp in her children's talk to the very last. Their words are not just what everybody else says, though they may be spelled the same. If I were to live till my Hans got old, I should still see the boy in him. A mother's love, I often say, is like a tree that has got all the wood in it, from the very first it made.'

'Is not that the way with friendship, too?' said Deronda, smiling. 'We must not let the mothers be too arrogant.'

The little woman shook her head over her darning.

'It is easier to find an old mother than an old friend. Friendships begin with liking or gratitude - roots that can be pulled up. Mother's love begins deeper down.'

'Like what you were saying about the influence of voices,' said Deronda, looking at Mirah. 'I don't think your hymn would have had more expression for me if I had known the words. I went to the synagogue at Frankfort before I came home, and the service impressed me just as much as if I had followed the words - perhaps more.'

'Oh, was it great to you? Did it go to your heart?' said Mirah, eagerly. 'I thought none but our people would feel that. I thought it was all shut away like a river in a deep valley, where only heaven saw - I mean - -' she hesitated feeling that she could not disentangle her thought from its imagery.

'I understand,' said Deronda. 'But there is not really such a separation - deeper down, as Mrs. Meyrick says. Our religion is chiefly a Hebrew religion; and since Jews are men, their religious feelings must have much in common with those of other men - just as their poetry, though in one sense peculiar, has a great deal in common with the poetry of other nations. Still it is to be expected that a Jew would feel the forms of his people's religion more than one of another race - and yet' - here Deronda hesitated in his turn - 'that is perhaps not always so.'

'Ah no,' said Mirah, sadly. 'I have seen that. I have seen them mock. Is it not like mocking your parents? - like rejoicing in your parents' shame?'

'Some minds naturally rebel against whatever they were brought up in, and like the opposite; they see the faults in what is nearest to them,' said Deronda apologetically.

'But you are not like that,' said Mirah, looking at him with unconscious fixedness.

'No, I think not,' said Deronda; 'but you know I was not brought up as a Jew.'

'Ah, I am always forgetting,' said Mirah, with a look of disappointed recollection, and slightly blushing.

Deronda also felt rather embarrassed, and there was an awkward pause, which he put an end to by saying playfully -

'Whichever way we take it, we have to tolerate each other; for if we all went in opposition to our teaching, we must end in difference, just the same.'

'To be sure. We should go on forever in zig-zags,' said Mrs. Meyrick. 'I think it is very weak-minded to make your creed up by the rule of the contrary. Still one may honor one's parents, without following their notions exactly, any more than the exact cut of their clothing. My father was a Scotch Calvinist and my mother was a French Calvinist; I am neither quite Scotch, nor quite French, nor two Calvinists rolled into one, yet I honor my parents' memory.'

'But I could not make myself not a Jewess,' said Mirah, insistently, 'even if I changed my belief.'

'No, my dear. But if Jews and Jewesses went on changing their religion, and making no difference between themselves and Christians, there would come a time when there would be no Jews to

be seen,' said Mrs. Meyrick, taking that consummation very cheerfully.

'Oh, please not to say that,' said Mirah, the tears gathering. 'It is the first unkind thing you ever said. I will not begin that. I will never separate myself from my mother's people. I was forced to fly from my father; but if he came back in age and weakness and want, and needed me, should I say, 'This is not my father'? If he had shame, I must share it. It was he who was given to me for my father, and not another. And so it is with my people. I will always be a Jewess. I will love Christians when they are good, like you. But I will always cling to my people. I will always worship with them.'

As Mirah had gone on speaking she had become possessed with a sorrowful passion - fervent, not violent. Holding her little hands tightly clasped and looking at Mrs. Meyrick with beseeching, she seemed to Deronda a personification of that spirit which impelled men after a long inheritance of professed Catholicism to leave wealth and high place and risk their lives in flight, that they might join their own people and say, 'I am a Jew.'

'Mirah, Mirah, my dear child, you mistake me!' said Mrs. Meyrick, alarmed. 'God forbid I should want you to do anything against your conscience. I was only saying what might be if the world went on. But I had better have left the world alone, and not wanted to be over-wise. Forgive me, come! we will not try to take you from anybody you feel has more right to you.'

'I would do anything else for you. I owe you my life,' said Mirah, not yet quite calm.

'Hush, hush, now,' said Mrs. Meyrick. 'I have been punished enough for wagging my tongue foolishly - making an almanac for the Millennium, as my husband used to say.'

'But everything in the world must come to an end some time. We must bear to think of that,' said Mab, unable to hold her peace on this point. She had already suffered from a bondage of tongue which threatened to become severe if Mirah were to be too much indulged in this inconvenient susceptibility to innocent remarks.

Deronda smiled at the irregular, blonde face, brought into strange contrast by the side of Mirah's - smiled, Mab thought, rather sarcastically as he said, 'That 'prospect of everything coming to an end will not guide us far in practice. Mirah's feelings, she tells us, are concerned with what is.'

Mab was confused and wished she had not spoken, since Mr Deronda seemed to think that she had found fault with Mirah; but to have spoken once is a tyrannous reason for speaking again, and she said -

'I only meant that we must have courage to hear things, else there is hardly anything we can talk about.' Mab felt herself unanswerable here, inclining to the opinion of Socrates: 'What motive has a man to live, if not for the pleasure of discourse?'

Deronda took his leave soon after, and when Mrs. Meyrick went outside with him to exchange a few words about Mirah, he said, 'Hans is to share my chambers when he comes at Christmas.'

'You have written to Rome about that?' said Mrs. Meyrick, her face lighting up. 'How very good and thoughtful of you! You mentioned Mirah, then?'

'Yes, I referred to her. I concluded he knew everything from you.'

'I must confess my folly. I have not yet written a word about her. I have always been meaning to do it, and yet have ended my letter without saying a word. And I told the girls to leave it to me. However! - Thank you a thousand times.'

Deronda divined something of what was in the mother's mind, and his divination reinforced a certain anxiety already present in him. His inward colloquy was not soothing. He said to himself that no man could see this exquisite creature without feeling it possible to fall in love with her; but all the fervor of his nature was engaged on the side of precaution. There are personages who feel themselves tragic because they march into a palpable morass, dragging another with them, and then cry out against all the gods. Deronda's mind was strongly set against imitating them.

'I have my hands on the reins now,' he thought, 'and I will not drop them. I shall go there as little as possible.'

He saw the reasons acting themselves out before him. How could he be Mirah's guardian and claim to unite with Mrs. Meyrick, to whose charge he had committed her, if he showed himself as a lover - whom she did not love - whom she would not marry? And if he encouraged any germ of lover's feeling in himself it would lead up to that issue. Mirah's was not a nature that would bear dividing against itself; and even if love won her consent to marry a man who was not of her race and religion, she would never be happy in acting against that strong native bias which would still reign in her conscience as remorse.



Deronda saw these consequences as we see any danger of marring our own work well begun. It was a delight to have rescued this child acquainted with sorrow, and to think of having placed her little feet in protected paths. The creature we help to save, though only a half-reared linnet, bruised and lost by the wayside - how we watch and fence it, and dote on its signs of recovery! Our pride becomes loving, our self is a not-self for whose sake we become virtuous, when we set to some hidden work of reclaiming a life from misery and look for our triumph in the secret joy - 'This one is the better for me.'

'I would as soon hold out my finger to be bitten off as set about spoiling her peace,' said Deronda. 'It was one of the rarest bits of fortune that I should have had friends like the Meyricks to place her with - generous, delicate friends without any loftiness in their ways, so that her dependence on them is not only safety but happiness. There could be no refuge to replace that, if it were broken up. But what is the use of my taking the vows and settling everything as it should be, if that marplot Hans comes and upsets it all?'

Few things were more likely. Hans was made for mishaps: his very limbs seemed more breakable than other people's - his eyes more of a resort for uninvited flies and other irritating guests. But it was impossible to forbid Hans's coming to London. He was intending to get a studio there and make it his chief home; and to propose that he should defer coming on some ostensible ground, concealing the real motive of winning time for Mirah's position to become more confirmed and independent, was impracticable. Having no other resource Deronda tried to believe that both he and Mrs. Meyrick were foolishly troubling themselves about one of those endless things called probabilities, which never occur; but he did not quite succeed in his trying; on the contrary, he found himself going inwardly through a scene where on the first discovery of Hans's inclination he gave him a very energetic warning - suddenly checked, however, by the suspicion of personal feeling that his warmth might be creating in Hans. He could come to no result, but that the position was peculiar, and that he could make no further provision against dangers until they came nearer. To save an unhappy Jewess from drowning herself, would not have seemed a startling variation among police reports; but to discover in her so rare a creature as Mirah, was an exceptional event which might well bring exceptional consequences. Deronda would not let himself for a moment dwell on any supposition that the consequences might enter deeply into his own life. The image of Mirah had never yet had that penetrating radiation which would have been given to it by the idea of her loving him. When this sort of effluence is absent from the fancy (whether from the fact or not) a man may go far in devotedness without perturbation.

As to the search for Mirah's mother and brother, Deronda took what she had said to-day as a warrant for deferring any immediate measures. His conscience was not quite easy in this desire for delay, any more than it was quite easy in his not attempting to learn the truth about his own mother: in both cases he felt that there might be an unfulfilled duty to a parent, but in both cases there was an overpowering repugnance to the possible truth, which threw a turning weight into the scale of argument.

'At least, I will look about,' was his final determination. 'I may find some special Jewish machinery. I will wait till after Christmas.'

What should we all do without the calendar, when we want to put off a disagreeable duty? The admirable arrangements of the solar system, by which our time is measured, always supply us with a term before which it is hardly worth while to set about anything we are disinclined to.