

BOOK X.

THE UNPRECEDENTED FINAL RESOLUTION OF PIERRE.

I.

Glorified be his gracious memory who first said, The deepest gloom precedes the day. We care not whether the saying will prove true to the utmost bounds of things; sufficient that it sometimes does hold true within the bounds of earthly finitude.

Next morning Pierre rose from the floor of his chamber, haggard and tattered in body from his past night's utter misery, but stoically serene and symmetrical in soul, with the foretaste of what then seemed to him a planned and perfect Future. Now he thinks he knows that the wholly unanticipated storm which had so terribly burst upon him, had yet burst upon him for his good; for the place, which in its undetected incipency, the storm had obscurely occupied in his soul, seemed now clear sky to him; and all his horizon seemed distinctly commanded by him.

His resolution was a strange and extraordinary one; but therefore it only the better met a strange and extraordinary emergency. But it was not only strange and extraordinary in its novelty of mere aspect, but it was wonderful in its unequaled renunciation of himself.

From the first, determined at all hazards to hold his father's fair fame inviolate from any thing he should do in reference to protecting Isabel, and extending to her a brother's utmost devotedness and love; and equally determined not to shake his mother's lasting peace by any useless exposure of unwelcome facts; and yet vowed in his deepest soul some way to embrace Isabel before the world, and yield to her his constant consolation and companionship; and finding no possible mode of unitedly compassing all these ends, without a most singular act of pious imposture, which he thought all heaven would justify in him, since he himself was to be the grand self-renouncing victim; therefore, this was his settled and immovable purpose now; namely: to assume before the world, that by secret rites, Pierre Glendinning was already become the husband of Isabel Banford--an assumption which would entirely warrant his dwelling in her continual company, and upon equal terms, taking her wherever the world admitted him; and at the same time foreclose all sinister inquisitions bearing upon his deceased parent's memory, or any way affecting his mother's lasting peace, as indissolubly linked with that. True, he in embryo, foreknew, that the extraordinary thing he had resolved, would, in another way, indirectly though inevitably, dart a most keen pang into his mother's heart; but this then seemed to him part of the unavoidable vast price of his enthusiastic virtue; and, thus minded, rather would he privately pain his living mother with a wound that might be curable, than cast world-wide and irremediable dishonor--so it seemed to him--upon his departed father.

Probably no other being than Isabel could have produced upon Pierre impressions powerful enough to eventuate in a final resolution so unparalleled as the above. But the wonderful melodiousness of her grief had touched the secret monochord within his breast, by an apparent magic, precisely similar to that which had moved the stringed tongue of her guitar to respond to the heart-strings of her own melancholy plaints. The deep voice of the being of Isabel called to him from out the immense distances of sky and air, and there seemed no veto of the earth that could forbid her heavenly claim.

During the three days that he had personally known her, and so been brought into magnetic contact with her, other persuasions and potencies than those direct ones, involved in her bewildering eyes and marvelous story, had unconsciously left their ineffaceable impressions on him, and perhaps without his privity, had mainly contributed to his resolve. She had impressed him as the glorious child of Pride and Grief, in whose countenance were traceable the divinest lineaments of both her parents. Pride gave to her her nameless nobleness; Grief touched that nobleness with an angelical softness; and again that softness was steeped in a most charitable humility, which was the foundation of her loftiest excellence of all.

Neither by word or letter had Isabel betrayed any spark of those more common emotions and desires which might not unreasonably be ascribed to an ordinary person placed in circumstances like hers. Though almost penniless, she had not invoked the pecuniary bounty of Pierre; and

though she was altogether silent on that subject, yet Pierre could not but be strangely sensible of something in her which disdained to voluntarily hang upon the mere bounty even of a brother. Nor, though she by various nameless ways, manifested her consciousness of being surrounded by uncongenial and inferior beings, while yet descended from a generous stock, and personally meriting the most refined companionships which the wide world could yield; nevertheless, she had not demanded of Pierre that he should array her in brocade, and lead her forth among the rare and opulent ladies of the land. But while thus evincing her intuitive, true lady-likeness and nobleness by this entire freedom from all sordid motives, neither had she merged all her feelings in any sickly sentimentalities of sisterly affection toward her so suddenly discovered brother; which, in the case of a naturally unattractive woman in her circumstances, would not have been altogether alluring to Pierre. No. That intense and indescribable longing, which her letter by its very incoherencies had best embodied, proceeded from no base, vain, or ordinary motive whatever; but was the unsuppressible and unmistakable cry of the godhead through her soul, commanding Pierre to fly to her, and do his highest and most glorious duty in the world.

Nor now, as it changedly seemed to Pierre, did that duty consist in stubbornly flying in the marble face of the Past, and striving to reverse the decree which had pronounced that Isabel could never perfectly inherit all the privileges of a legitimate child of her father. And thoroughly now he felt, that even as this would in the present case be both preposterous in itself and cruel in effect to both

the living and the dead, so was it entirely undesired by Isabel, who though once yielding to a momentary burst of aggressive enthusiasm, yet in her more wonted mood of mournfulness and sweetness, evinced no such lawless wandering. Thoroughly, now he felt, that Isabel was content to live obscure in her paternal identity, so long as she could any way appease her deep longings for the constant love and sympathy and close domestic contact of some one of her blood. So that Pierre had no slightest misgiving that upon learning the character of his scheme, she would deem it to come short of her natural expectations; while so far as its apparent strangeness was concerned,--a strangeness, perhaps invincible to squeamish and humdrum women--here Pierre anticipated no obstacle in Isabel; for her whole past was strange, and strangeness seemed best befitting to her future.

But had Pierre now reread the opening paragraph of her letter to him, he might have very quickly derived a powerful anticipative objection from his sister, which his own complete disinterestedness concealed from him. Though Pierre had every reason to believe that--owing to her secluded and humble life--Isabel was in entire ignorance of the fact of his precise relation to Lucy Tartan:--an ignorance, whose first indirect and unconscious manifestation in Isabel, had been unspeakably welcome to him;--and though, of course, he had both wisely and benevolently abstained from enlightening her on that point; still, notwithstanding this, was it possible that any true-hearted noble girl like Isabel, would, to benefit herself, willingly become a participator in an act, which would prospectively and forever bar the blessed boon of

marriageable love from one so young and generous as Pierre, and eternally entangle him in a fictitious alliance, which, though in reality but a web of air, yet in effect would prove a wall of iron; for the same powerful motive which induced the thought of forming such an alliance, would always thereafter forbid that tacit exposure of its fictitiousness, which would be consequent upon its public discontinuance, and the real nuptials of Pierre with any other being during the lifetime of Isabel.

But according to what view you take of it, it is either the gracious or the malicious gift of the great gods to man, that on the threshold of any wholly new and momentous devoted enterprise, the thousand ulterior intricacies and emperilings to which it must conduct; these, at the outset, are mostly withheld from sight; and so, through her ever-primeval wilderness Fortune's Knight rides on, alike ignorant of the palaces or the pitfalls in its heart. Surprising, and past all ordinary belief, are those strange oversights and inconsistencies, into which the enthusiastic meditation upon unique or extreme resolves will sometimes beget in young and over-ardent souls. That all-comprehending oneness, that calm representativeness, by which a steady philosophic mind reaches forth and draws to itself, in their collective entirety, the objects of its contemplations; that pertains not to the young enthusiast. By his eagerness, all objects are deceptively foreshortened; by his intensity each object is viewed as detached; so that essentially and relatively every thing is misseen by him. Already have we exposed that passing preposterousness in Pierre, which by reason of the

above-named cause which we have endeavored to portray, induced him to cherish for a time four unitedly impossible designs. And now we behold this hapless youth all eager to involve himself in such an inextricable twist of Fate, that the three dextrous maids themselves could hardly disentangle him, if once he tie the complicating knots about him and Isabel.

Ah, thou rash boy! are there no couriers in the air to warn thee away from these emperilings, and point thee to those Cretan labyrinths, to which thy life's cord is leading thee? Where now are the high beneficences? Whither fled the sweet angels that are alledged guardians to man?

Not that the impulsive Pierre wholly overlooked all that was menacing to him in his future, if now he acted out his most rare resolve; but eagerly foreshortened by him, they assumed not their full magnitude of menacing; nor, indeed,--so riveted now his purpose--were they pushed up to his face, would he for that renounce his self-renunciation; while concerning all things more immediately contingent upon his central resolution; these were, doubtless, in a measure, foreseen and understood by him. Perfectly, at least, he seemed to foresee and understand, that the present hope of Lucy Tartan must be banished from his being; that this would carry a terrible pang to her, which in the natural recoil would but redouble his own; that to the world all his heroicness, standing equally unexplained and unsuspected, therefore the world would denounce him as infamously false to his betrothed; reckless of the most

binding human vows; a secret wooer and wedder of an unknown and enigmatic girl; a spurner of all a loving mother's wisest counselings; a bringer down of lasting reproach upon an honorable name; a besotted self-exile from a most prosperous house and bounteous fortune; and lastly, that now his whole life would, in the eyes of the wide humanity, be covered with an all-pervading haze of incurable sinisterness, possibly not to be removed even in the concluding hour of death.

Such, oh thou son of man! are the perils and the miseries thou callest down on thee, when, even in a virtuous cause, thou steppest aside from those arbitrary lines of conduct, by which the common world, however base and dastardly, surrounds thee for thy worldly good.

Ofttimes it is very wonderful to trace the rarest and profoundest things, and find their probable origin in something extremely trite or trivial. Yet so strange and complicate is the human soul; so much is confusedly evolved from out itself, and such vast and varied accessions come to it from abroad, and so impossible is it always to distinguish between these two, that the wisest man were rash, positively to assign the precise and incipient origination of his final thoughts and acts. Far as we blind moles can see, man's life seems but an acting upon mysterious hints; it is somehow hinted to us, to do thus or thus. For surely no mere mortal who has at all gone down into himself will ever pretend that his slightest thought or act solely originates in his own defined identity. This preamble seems not entirely unnecessary as usher of the strange conceit, that possibly the latent germ of Pierre's

proposed extraordinary mode of executing his proposed extraordinary resolve--namely, the nominal conversion of a sister into a wife--might have been found in the previous conversational conversion of a mother into a sister; for hereby he had habituated his voice and manner to a certain fictitiousness in one of the closest domestic relations of life; and since man's moral texture is very porous, and things assumed upon the surface, at last strike in--hence, this outward habituation to the above-named fictitiousness had insensibly disposed his mind to it as it were; but only innocently and pleasantly as yet. If, by any possibility, this general conceit be so, then to Pierre the times of sportfulness were as pregnant with the hours of earnestness; and in sport he learnt the terms of woe.

II.

If next to that resolve concerning his lasting fraternal succor to Isabel, there was at this present time any determination in Pierre absolutely inflexible, and partaking at once of the sacredness and the indissolubleness of the most solemn oath, it was the enthusiastic, and apparently wholly supererogatory resolution to hold his father's memory untouched; nor to one single being in the world reveal the paternity of Isabel. Unrecallably dead and gone from out the living world, again returned to utter helplessness, so far as this world went; his perished father seemed to appeal to the dutifulness and mercifulness of Pierre, in terms far more moving than though the accents proceeded from his

mortal mouth. And what though not through the sin of Pierre, but through his father's sin, that father's fair fame now lay at the mercy of the son, and could only be kept inviolate by the son's free sacrifice of all earthly felicity;--what if this were so? It but struck a still loftier chord in the bosom of the son, and filled him with infinite magnanimites. Never had the generous Pierre cherished the heathenish conceit, that even in the general world, Sin is a fair object to be stretched on the cruelest racks by self-complacent Virtue, that self-complacent Virtue may feed her lily-liveredness on the pallor of Sin's anguish. For perfect Virtue does not more loudly claim our approbation, than repented Sin in its concludedness does demand our utmost tenderness and concern. And as the more immense the Virtue, so should be the more immense our approbation; likewise the more immense the Sin, the more infinite our pity. In some sort, Sin hath its sacredness, not less than holiness. And great Sin calls forth more magnanimity than small Virtue. What man, who is a man, does not feel livelier and more generous emotions toward the great god of Sin--Satan,--than toward yonder haberdasher, who only is a sinner in the small and entirely honorable way of trade?

Though Pierre profoundly shuddered at that impenetrable yet blackly significant nebulosity, which the wild story of Isabel threw around the early life of his father; yet as he recalled the dumb anguish of the invocation of the empty and the ashy hand uplifted from his father's death-bed, he most keenly felt that of whatsoever unknown shade his father's guilt might be, yet in the final hour of death it had been most

dismally repented of; by a repentance only the more full of utter wretchedness, that it was a consuming secret in him. Mince the matter how his family would, had not his father died a raver? Whence that raving, following so prosperous a life? Whence, but from the cruelest compunctions?

Touched thus, and strung in all his sinews and his nerves to the holding of his father's memory intact,--Pierre turned his confronting and unfrightened face toward Lucy Tartan, and stilly vowed that not even she should know the whole; no, not know the least.

There is an inevitable keen cruelty in the loftier heroism. It is not heroism only to stand unflinched ourselves in the hour of suffering; but it is heroism to stand unflinched both at our own and at some loved one's united suffering; a united suffering, which we could put an instant period to, if we would but renounce the glorious cause for which ourselves do bleed, and see our most loved one bleed. If he would not reveal his father's shame to the common world, whose favorable opinion for himself, Pierre now despised; how then reveal it to the woman he adored? To her, above all others, would he now uncover his father's tomb, and bid her behold from what vile attainings he himself had sprung? So Pierre turned round and tied Lucy to the same stake which must hold himself, for he too plainly saw, that it could not be, but that both their hearts must burn.

Yes, his resolve concerning his father's memory involved the necessity

of assuming even to Lucy his marriage with Isabel. Here he could not explain himself, even to her. This would aggravate the sharp pang of parting, by self-suggested, though wholly groundless surmising in Lucy's mind, in the most miserable degree contaminating to her idea of him. But on this point, he still fondly trusted that without at all marring his filial bond, he would be enabled by some significant intimations to arrest in Lucy's mind those darker imaginings which might find entrance there; and if he could not set her wholly right, yet prevent her from going wildly wrong.

For his mother Pierre was more prepared. He considered that by an inscrutable decree, which it was but foolishness to try to evade, or shun, or deny existence to, since he felt it so profoundly pressing on his inmost soul; the family of the Glendinnings was imperiously called upon to offer up a victim to the gods of woe; one grand victim at the least; and that grand victim must be his mother, or himself. If he disclosed his secret to the world, then his mother was made the victim; if at all hazards he kept it to himself, then himself would be the victim. A victim as respecting his mother, because under the peculiar circumstances of the case, the non-disclosure of the secret involved her entire and infamy-engendering misconception of himself. But to this he bowed submissive.

One other thing--and the last to be here named, because the very least in the conscious thoughts of Pierre; one other thing remained to menace him with assured disastrousness. This thing it was, which though but

dimly hinted of as yet, still in the apprehension must have exerted a powerful influence upon Pierre, in preparing him for the worst.

His father's last and fatal sickness had seized him suddenly. Both the probable concealed distraction of his mind with reference to his early life as recalled to him in an evil hour, and his consequent mental wanderings; these, with other reasons, had prevented him from framing a new will to supersede one made shortly after his marriage, and ere Pierre was born. By that will which as yet had never been dragged into the courts of law; and which, in the fancied security of her own and her son's congenial and loving future, Mrs. Glendinning had never but once, and then inconclusively, offered to discuss, with a view to a better and more appropriate ordering of things to meet circumstances non-existent at the period the testament was framed; by that will, all the Glendinning property was declared his mother's.

Acutely sensible to those prophetic intimations in him, which painted in advance the haughty temper of his offended mother, as all bitterness and scorn toward a son, once the object of her proudest joy, but now become a deep reproach, as not only rebellious to her, but glaringly dishonorable before the world; Pierre distinctly foresaw, that as she never would have permitted Isabel Banford in her true character to cross her threshold; neither would she now permit Isabel Banford to cross her threshold in any other, and disguised character; least of all, as that unknown and insidious girl, who by some pernicious arts had lured her only son from honor into infamy. But not to admit Isabel, was now to

exclude Pierre, if indeed on independent grounds of exasperation against himself, his mother would not cast him out.

Nor did the same interior intimations in him which fore-painted the above bearing of his mother, abstain to trace her whole haughty heart as so unrelentingly set against him, that while she would close her doors against both him and his fictitious wife, so also she would not willingly contribute one copper to support them in a supposed union so entirely abhorrent to her. And though Pierre was not so familiar with the science of the law, as to be quite certain what the law, if appealed to concerning the provisions of his father's will, would decree concerning any possible claims of the son to share with the mother in the property of the sire; yet he prospectively felt an invincible repugnance to dragging his dead father's hand and seal into open Court, and fighting over them with a base mercenary motive, and with his own mother for the antagonist. For so thoroughly did his infallible presentiments paint his mother's character to him, as operated upon and disclosed in all those fiercer traits,--hitherto held in abeyance by the mere chance and felicity of circumstances,--that he felt assured that her exasperation against him would even meet the test of a public legal contention concerning the Glendinning property. For indeed there was a reserved strength and masculineness in the character of his mother, from which on all these points Pierre had every thing to dread. Besides, will the matter how he would, Pierre for nearly two whole years to come, would still remain a minor, an infant in the eye of the law, incapable of personally asserting any legal claim; and though he might sue by his

next friend, yet who would be his voluntary next friend, when the execution of his great resolve would, for him, depopulate all the world of friends?

Now to all these things, and many more, seemed the soul of this infatuated young enthusiast braced.

III.

There is a dark, mad mystery in some human hearts, which, sometimes, during the tyranny of a usurper mood, leads them to be all eagerness to cast off the most intense beloved bond, as a hindrance to the attainment of whatever transcendental object that usurper mood so tyrannically suggests. Then the beloved bond seems to hold us to no essential good; lifted to exalted mounts, we can dispense with all the vale; endearments we spurn; kisses are blisters to us; and forsaking the palpitating forms of mortal love, we emptily embrace the boundless and the unbodied air. We think we are not human; we become as immortal bachelors and gods; but again, like the Greek gods themselves, prone we descend to earth; glad to be uxorious once more; glad to hide these god-like heads within the bosoms made of too-seducing clay.

Weary with the invariable earth, the restless sailor breaks from every enfolding arm, and puts to sea in height of tempest that blows off shore. But in long night-watches at the antipodes, how heavily that

ocean gloom lies in vast bales upon the deck; thinking that that very moment in his deserted hamlet-home the household sun is high, and many a sun-eyed maiden meridian as the sun. He curses Fate; himself he curses; his senseless madness, which is himself. For whoso once has known this sweet knowledge, and then fled it; in absence, to him the avenging dream will come.

Pierre was now this vulnerable god; this self-upbraiding sailor; this dreamer of the avenging dream. Though in some things he had unjuggled himself, and forced himself to eye the prospect as it was; yet, so far as Lucy was concerned, he was at bottom still a juggler. True, in his extraordinary scheme, Lucy was so intimately interwoven, that it seemed impossible for him at all to cast his future without some way having that heart's love in view. But ignorant of its quantity as yet, or fearful of ascertaining it; like an algebraist, for the real Lucy he, in his scheming thoughts, had substituted but a sign--some empty x--and in the ultimate solution of the problem, that empty x still figured; not the real Lucy.

But now, when risen from the abasement of his chamber-floor, and risen from the still profounder prostration of his soul, Pierre had thought that all the horizon of his dark fate was commanded by him; all his resolutions clearly defined, and immovably decreed; now finally, to top all, there suddenly slid into his inmost heart the living and breathing form of Lucy. His lungs collapsed; his eyeballs glared; for the sweet imagined form, so long buried alive in him, seemed now as gliding on

him from the grave; and her light hair swept far adown her shroud.

Then, for the time, all minor things were whelmed in him; his mother, Isabel, the whole wide world; and one only thing remained to him;--this all-including query--Lucy or God?

But here we draw a veil. Some nameless struggles of the soul can not be painted, and some woes will not be told. Let the ambiguous procession of events reveal their own ambiguousness.

BOOK XI.

HE CROSSES THE RUBICON

I.

Sucked within the Maelstrom, man must go round. Strike at one end the longest conceivable row of billiard balls in close contact, and the furthestmost ball will start forth, while all the rest stand still; and yet that last ball was not struck at all. So, through long previous generations, whether of births or thoughts, Fate strikes the present man. Idly he disowns the blow's effect, because he felt no blow, and indeed, received no blow. But Pierre was not arguing Fixed Fate and Free Will, now; Fixed Fate and Free Will were arguing him, and Fixed Fate got