BOOK III—FORTUNATE MISFORTUNE

CHAPTER I—PRINCESS CINDERELLA

The porter, drawn by the growing turmoil, had vanished from the postern, and the door stood open on the darkness of the night. As Seraphina fled up the terraces, the cries and loud footing of the mob drew nearer the doomed palace; the rush was like the rush of cavalry; the sound of shattering lamps tingled above the rest; and, overtowering all, she heard her own name bandied among the shouters. A bugle sounded at the door of the guard-room; one gun was fired; and then with the yell of hundreds, Mittwalden Palace was carried at a rush.

Sped by these dire sounds and voices, the Princess scaled the long garden, skimming like a bird the starlit stairways; crossed the Park, which was in that place narrow; and plunged upon the farther side into the rude shelter of the forest. So, at a bound, she left the discretion and the cheerful lamps of Palace evenings; ceased utterly to be a sovereign lady; and, falling from the whole height of civilisation, ran forth into the woods, a ragged Cinderella.

She went direct before her through an open tract of the forest, full of

brush and birches, and where the starlight guided her; and, beyond that again, must thread the columned blackness of a pine grove joining overhead the thatch of its long branches. At that hour the place was breathless; a horror of night like a presence occupied that dungeon of the wood; and she went groping, knocking against the boles—her ear, betweenwhiles, strained to aching and yet unrewarded.

But the slope of the ground was upward, and encouraged her; and presently she issued on a rocky hill that stood forth above the sea of forest. All around were other hill-tops, big and little; sable vales of forest between; overhead the open heaven and the brilliancy of countless stars; and along the western sky the dim forms of mountains. The glory of the great night laid hold upon her; her eyes shone with stars; she dipped her sight into the coolness and brightness of the sky, as she might have dipped her wrist into a spring; and her heart, at that ethereal shock, began to move more soberly. The sun that sails overhead, ploughing into gold the fields of daylight azure and uttering the signal to man's myriads, has no word apart for man the individual; and the moon, like a violin, only praises and laments our private destiny. The stars alone, cheerful whisperers, confer quietly with each of us like friends; they give ear to our sorrows smilingly, like wise old men, rich in tolerance; and by their double scale, so small to the eye, so vast to the imagination, they keep before the mind the double character of man's nature and fate.

There sat the Princess, beautifully looking upon beauty, in council with these glad advisers. Bright like pictures, clear like a voice in the

porches of her ear, memory re-enacted the tumult of the evening: the Countess and the dancing fan, the big Baron on his knees, the blood on the polished floor, the knocking, the swing of the litter down the avenue of lamps, the messenger, the cries of the charging mob; and yet all were far away and phantasmal, and she was still healingly conscious of the peace and glory of the night. She looked towards Mittwalden; and above the hill-top, which already hid it from her view, a throbbing redness hinted of fire. Better so: better so, that she should fall with tragic greatness, lit by a blazing palace! She felt not a trace of pity for Gondremark or of concern for Grünewald: that period of her life was closed for ever, a wrench of wounded vanity alone surviving. She had but one clear idea: to flee;—and another, obscure and half-rejected, although still obeyed: to flee in the direction of the Felsenburg. She had a duty to perform, she must free Otto—so her mind said, very coldly; but her heart embraced the notion of that duty even with ardour, and her hands began to yearn for the grasp of kindness.

She rose, with a start of recollection, and plunged down the slope into the covert. The woods received and closed upon her. Once more, she wandered and hasted in a blot, uncheered, unpiloted. Here and there, indeed, through rents in the wood-roof, a glimmer attracted her; here and there a tree stood out among its neighbours by some force of outline; here and there a brushing among the leaves, a notable blackness, a dim shine, relieved, only to exaggerate, the solid oppression of the night and silence. And betweenwhiles, the unfeatured darkness would redouble and the whole ear of night appear to be gloating on her steps. Now she would stand still, and the silence, would grow and grow, till it weighed

upon her breathing; and then she would address herself again to run, stumbling, falling, and still hurrying the more. And presently the whole wood rocked and began to run along with her. The noise of her own mad passage through the silence spread and echoed, and filled the night with terror. Panic hunted her: Panic from the trees reached forth with clutching branches; the darkness was lit up and peopled with strange forms and faces. She strangled and fled before her fears. And yet in the last fortress, reason, blown upon by these gusts of terror, still shone with a troubled light. She knew, yet could not act upon her knowledge; she knew that she must stop, and yet she still ran.

She was already near madness, when she broke suddenly into a narrow clearing. At the same time the din grew louder, and she became conscious of vague forms and fields of whiteness. And with that the earth gave way; she fell and found her feet again with an incredible shock to her senses, and her mind was swallowed up.

When she came again to herself, she was standing to the mid-leg in an icy eddy of a brook, and leaning with one hand on the rock from which it poured. The spray had wet her hair. She saw the white cascade, the stars wavering in the shaken pool, foam flitting, and high overhead the tall pines on either hand serenely drinking starshine; and in the sudden quiet of her spirit she heard with joy the firm plunge of the cataract in the pool. She scrambled forth dripping. In the face of her proved weakness, to adventure again upon the horror of blackness in the groves were a suicide of life or reason. But here, in the alley of the brook, with the kind stars above her, and the moon presently swimming into

sight, she could await the coming of day without alarm.

This lane of pine-trees ran very rapidly down-hill and wound among the woods; but it was a wider thoroughfare than the brook needed, and here and there were little dimpling lawns and coves of the forest, where the starshine slumbered. Such a lawn she paced, taking patience bravely; and now she looked up the hill and saw the brook coming down to her in a series of cascades; and now approached the margin, where it welled among the rushes silently; and now gazed at the great company of heaven with an enduring wonder. The early evening had fallen chill, but the night was now temperate; out of the recesses of the wood there came mild airs as from a deep and peaceful breathing; and the dew was heavy on the grass and the tight-shut daisies. This was the girl's first night under the naked heaven; and now that her fears were overpast, she was touched to the soul by its serene amenity and peace. Kindly the host of heaven blinked down upon that wandering Princess; and the honest brook had no words but to encourage her.

At last she began to be aware of a wonderful revolution, compared to which the fire of Mittwalden Palace was but the crack and flash of a percussion-cap. The countenance with which the pines regarded her began insensibly to change; the grass too, short as it was, and the whole winding staircase of the brook's course, began to wear a solemn freshness of appearance. And this slow transfiguration reached her heart, and played upon it, and transpierced it with a serious thrill. She looked all about; the whole face of nature looked back, brimful of meaning, finger on lip, leaking its glad secret. She looked up. Heaven was

almost emptied of stars. Such as still lingered shone with a changed and waning brightness, and began to faint in their stations. And the colour of the sky itself was the most wonderful; for the rich blue of the night had now melted and softened and brightened; and there had succeeded in its place a hue that has no name, and that is never seen but as the herald of morning. 'O!' she cried, joy catching at her voice, 'O! it is the dawn!'

In a breath she passed over the brook, and looped up her skirts and fairly ran in the dim alleys. As she ran, her ears were aware of many pipings, more beautiful than music; in the small dish-shaped houses in the fork of giant arms, where they had lain all night, lover by lover, warmly pressed, the bright-eyed, big-hearted singers began to awaken for the day. Her heart melted and flowed forth to them in kindness. And they, from their small and high perches in the clerestories of the wood cathedral, peered down sidelong at the ragged Princess as she flitted below them on the carpet of the moss and tassel.

Soon she had struggled to a certain hill-top, and saw far before her the silent inflooding of the day. Out of the East it welled and whitened; the darkness trembled into light; and the stars were extinguished like the street-lamps of a human city. The whiteness brightened into silver, the silver warmed into gold, the gold kindled into pure and living fire; and the face of the East was barred with elemental scarlet. The day drew its first long breath, steady and chill; and for leagues around the woods sighed and shivered. And then, at one bound, the sun had floated up; and her startled eyes received day's first arrow, and quailed under the

buffet. On every side, the shadows leaped from their ambush and fell prone. The day was come, plain and garish; and up the steep and solitary eastern heaven, the sun, victorious over his competitors, continued slowly and royally to mount.

Seraphina drooped for a little, leaning on a pine, the shrill joy of the woodlands mocking her. The shelter of the night, the thrilling and joyous changes of the dawn, were over; and now, in the hot eye of the day, she turned uneasily and looked sighingly about her. Some way off among the lower woods, a pillar of smoke was mounting and melting in the gold and blue. There, surely enough, were human folk, the hearth-surrounders. Man's fingers had laid the twigs; it was man's breath that had quickened and encouraged the baby flames; and now, as the fire caught, it would be playing ruddily on the face of its creator. At the thought, she felt a-cold and little and lost in that great out-of-doors. The electric shock of the young sun-beams and the unhuman beauty of the woods began to irk and daunt her. The covert of the house, the decent privacy of rooms, the swept and regulated fire, all that denotes or beautifies the home life of man, began to draw her as with cords. The pillar of smoke was now risen into some stream of moving air; it began to lean out sideways in a pennon; and thereupon, as though the change had been a summons, Seraphina plunged once more into the labyrinth of the wood.

She left day upon the high ground. In the lower groves there still

lingered the blue early twilight and the seizing freshness of the dew. But here and there, above this field of shadow, the head of a great outspread pine was already glorious with day; and here and there, through the breaches of the hills, the sun-beams made a great and luminous entry. Here Seraphina hastened along forest paths. She had lost sight of the pilot smoke, which blew another way, and conducted herself in that great wilderness by the direction of the sun. But presently fresh signs bespoke the neighbourhood of man; felled trunks, white slivers from the axe, bundles of green boughs, and stacks of firewood. These guided her forward; until she came forth at last upon the clearing whence the smoke arose. A hut stood in the clear shadow, hard by a brook which made a series of inconsiderable falls; and on the threshold the Princess saw a sun-burnt and hard-featured woodman, standing with his hands behind his back and gazing skyward.

She went to him directly: a beautiful, bright-eyed, and haggard vision; splendidly arrayed and pitifully tattered; the diamond ear-drops still glittering in her ears; and with the movement of her coming, one small breast showing and hiding among the ragged covert of the laces. At that ambiguous hour, and coming as she did from the great silence of the forest, the man drew back from the Princess as from something elfin.

'I am cold,' she said, 'and weary. Let me rest beside your fire.'

The woodman was visibly commoved, but answered nothing.

'I will pay,' she said, and then repented of the words, catching perhaps

a spark of terror from his frightened eyes. But, as usual, her courage rekindled brighter for the check. She put him from the door and entered; and he followed her in superstitious wonder.

Within, the hut was rough and dark; but on the stone that served as hearth, twigs and a few dry branches burned with the brisk sounds and all the variable beauty of fire. The very sight of it composed her; she crouched hard by on the earth floor and shivered in the glow, and looked upon the eating blaze with admiration. The woodman was still staring at his guest: at the wreck of the rich dress, the bare arms, the bedraggled laces and the gems. He found no word to utter.

'Give me food,' said she,—'here, by the fire.'

He set down a pitcher of coarse wine, bread, a piece of cheese, and a handful of raw onions. The bread was hard and sour, the cheese like leather; even the onion, which ranks with the truffle and the nectarine in the chief place of honour of earth's fruits, is not perhaps a dish for princesses when raw. But she ate, if not with appetite, with courage; and when she had eaten, did not disdain the pitcher. In all her life before, she had not tasted of gross food nor drunk after another; but a brave woman far more readily accepts a change of circumstances than the bravest man. All that while, the woodman continued to observe her furtively, many low thoughts of fear and greed contending in his eyes. She read them clearly, and she knew she must begone.

Presently she arose and offered him a florin.

'Will that repay you?' she asked.

But here the man found his tongue. 'I must have more than that,' said he.

'It is all I have to give you,' she returned, and passed him by serenely.

Yet her heart trembled, for she saw his hand stretched forth as if to arrest her, and his unsteady eyes wandering to his axe. A beaten path led westward from the clearing, and she swiftly followed it. She did not glance behind her. But as soon as the least turning of the path had concealed her from the woodman's eyes, she slipped among the trees and ran till she deemed herself in safety.

By this time the strong sunshine pierced in a thousand places the pine-thatch of the forest, fired the red boles, irradiated the cool aisles of shadow, and burned in jewels on the grass. The gum of these trees was dearer to the senses than the gums of Araby; each pine, in the lusty morning sunlight, burned its own wood-incense; and now and then a breeze would rise and toss these rooted censers, and send shade and sun-gem flitting, swift as swallows, thick as bees; and wake a brushing bustle of sounds that murmured and went by.

On she passed, and up and down, in sun and shadow; now aloft on the bare ridge among the rocks and birches, with the lizards and the snakes; and anon in the deep grove among sunless pillars. Now she followed wandering

wood-paths, in the maze of valleys; and again, from a hill-top, beheld the distant mountains and the great birds circling under the sky. She would see afar off a nestling hamlet, and go round to avoid it. Below, she traced the course of the foam of mountain torrents. Nearer hand, she saw where the tender springs welled up in silence, or oozed in green moss; or in the more favoured hollows a whole family of infant rivers would combine, and tinkle in the stones, and lie in pools to be a bathing-place for sparrows, or fall from the sheer rock in rods of crystal. Upon all these things, as she still sped along in the bright air, she looked with a rapture of surprise and a joyful fainting of the heart; they seemed so novel, they touched so strangely home, they were so hued and scented, they were so beset and canopied by the dome of the blue air of heaven.

At length, when she was well weary, she came upon a wide and shallow pool. Stones stood in it, like islands; bulrushes fringed the coast; the floor was paved with the pine needles; and the pines themselves, whose roots made promontories, looked down silently on their green images. She crept to the margin and beheld herself with wonder, a hollow and bright-eyed phantom, in the ruins of her palace robe. The breeze now shook her image; now it would be marred with flies; and at that she smiled; and from the fading circles, her counterpart smiled back to her and looked kind. She sat long in the warm sun, and pitied her bare arms that were all bruised and marred with falling, and marvelled to see that she was dirty, and could not grow to believe that she had gone so long in such a strange disorder.

Then, with a sigh, she addressed herself to make a toilette by that forest mirror, washed herself pure from all the stains of her adventure, took off her jewels and wrapped them in her handkerchief, re-arranged the tatters of her dress, and took down the folds of her hair. She shook it round her face, and the pool repeated her thus veiled. Her hair had smelt like violets, she remembered Otto saying; and so now she tried to smell it, and then shook her head, and laughed a little, sadly, to herself.

The laugh was returned upon her in a childish echo.

She looked up; and lo! two children looking on,—a small girl and a yet smaller boy, standing, like playthings, by the pool, below a spreading pine. Seraphina was not fond of children, and now she was startled to the heart.

'Who are you?' she cried hoarsely.

The mites huddled together and drew back; and Seraphina's heart reproached her that she should have frightened things so quaint and little, and yet alive with senses. She thought upon the birds and looked again at her two visitors; so little larger and so far more innocent. On their clear faces, as in a pool, she saw the reflection of their fears. With gracious purpose she arose.

'Come,' she said, 'do not be afraid of me,' and took a step towards them.

But alas! at the first moment, the two poor babes in the wood turned and ran helter-skelter from the Princess.

The most desolate pang was struck into the girl's heart. Here she was, twenty-two—soon twenty-three—and not a creature loved her; none but Otto;
and would even he forgive? If she began weeping in these woods alone, it would mean death or madness. Hastily she trod the thoughts out like a burning paper; hastily rolled up her locks, and with terror dogging her, and her whole bosom sick with grief, resumed her journey.

Past ten in the forenoon, she struck a high-road, marching in that place uphill between two stately groves, a river of sunlight; and here, dead weary, careless of consequences, and taking some courage from the human and civilised neighbourhood of the road, she stretched herself on the green margin in the shadow of a tree. Sleep closed on her, at first with a horror of fainting, but when she ceased to struggle, kindly embracing her. So she was taken home for a little, from all her toils and sorrows, to her Father's arms. And there in the meanwhile her body lay exposed by the highwayside, in tattered finery; and on either hand from the woods the birds came flying by and calling upon others, and debated in their own tongue this strange appearance.

The sun pursued his journey; the shadow flitted from her feet, shrank higher and higher, and was upon the point of leaving her altogether, when the rumble of a coach was signalled to and fro by the birds. The road in that part was very steep; the rumble drew near with great deliberation;

and ten minutes passed before a gentleman appeared, walking with a sober elderly gait upon the grassy margin of the highway, and looking pleasantly around him as he walked. From time to time he paused, took out his note-book and made an entry with a pencil; and any spy who had been near enough would have heard him mumbling words as though he were a poet testing verses. The voice of the wheels was still faint, and it was plain the traveller had far outstripped his carriage.

He had drawn very near to where the Princess lay asleep, before his eye alighted on her; but when it did he started, pocketed his note-book, and approached. There was a milestone close to where she lay; and he sat down on that and coolly studied her. She lay upon one side, all curled and sunken, her brow on one bare arm, the other stretched out, limp and dimpled. Her young body, like a thing thrown down, had scarce a mark of life. Her breathing stirred her not. The deadliest fatigue was thus confessed in every language of the sleeping flesh. The traveller smiled grimly. As though he had looked upon a statue, he made a grudging inventory of her charms: the figure in that touching freedom of forgetfulness surprised him; the flush of slumber became her like a flower.

'Upon my word,' he thought, 'I did not think the girl could be so pretty. And to think,' he added, 'that I am under obligation not to use one word of this!' He put forth his stick and touched her; and at that she awoke, sat up with a cry, and looked upon him wildly.

'I trust your Highness has slept well,' he said, nodding.

But she only uttered sounds.

'Compose yourself,' said he, giving her certainly a brave example in his own demeanour. 'My chaise is close at hand; and I shall have, I trust, the singular entertainment of abducting a sovereign Princess.'

'Sir John!' she said, at last.

'At your Highness's disposal,' he replied.

She sprang to her feet. 'O!' she cried, 'have you come from Mittwalden?'

'This morning,' he returned, 'I left it; and if there is any one less likely to return to it than yourself, behold him!'

'The Baron—' she began, and paused.

'Madam,' he answered, 'it was well meant, and you are quite a Judith; but after the hours that have elapsed, you will probably be relieved to hear that he is fairly well. I took his news this morning ere I left. Doing fairly well, they said, but suffering acutely. Hey?—acutely. They could hear his groans in the next room.'

'And the Prince,' she asked, 'is anything known of him?'

'It is reported,' replied Sir John, with the same pleasurable deliberation, 'that upon that point your Highness is the best authority.'

'Sir John,' she said eagerly, 'you were generous enough to speak about your carriage. Will you, I beseech you, will you take me to the Felsenburg? I have business there of an extreme importance.'

'I can refuse you nothing,' replied the old gentleman, gravely and seriously enough. 'Whatever, madam, it is in my power to do for you, that shall be done with pleasure. As soon as my chaise shall overtake us, it is yours to carry you where you will. But,' added he, reverting to his former manner, 'I observe you ask me nothing of the Palace.'

'I do not care,' she said. 'I thought I saw it burning.'

'Prodigious!' said the Baronet. 'You thought? And can the loss of forty toilettes leave you cold? Well, madam, I admire your fortitude. And the state, too? As I left, the government was sitting,—the new government, of which at least two members must be known to you by name: Sabra, who had, I believe, the benefit of being formed in your employment—a footman, am I right?—and our old friend the Chancellor, in something of a subaltern position. But in these convulsions the last shall be first, and the first last.'

'Sir John,' she said, with an air of perfect honesty, 'I am sure you mean most kindly, but these matters have no interest for me.'

The Baronet was so utterly discountenanced that he hailed the appearance of his chaise with welcome, and, by way of saying something, proposed that they should walk back to meet it. So it was done; and he helped her in with courtesy, mounted to her side, and from various receptacles (for the chaise was most completely fitted out) produced fruits and truffled liver, beautiful white bread, and a bottle of delicate wine. With these he served her like a father, coaxing and praising her to fresh exertions; and during all that time, as though silenced by the laws of hospitality, he was not guilty of the shadow of a sneer. Indeed his kindness seemed so genuine that Seraphina was moved to gratitude.

'Sir John,' she said, 'you hate me in your heart; why are you so kind to me?'

'Ah, my good lady,' said he, with no disclaimer of the accusation, 'I have the honour to be much your husband's friend, and somewhat his admirer.'

'You!' she cried. 'They told me you wrote cruelly of both of us.'

'Such was the strange path by which we grew acquainted,' said Sir John. 'I had written, madam, with particular cruelty (since that shall be the phrase) of your fair self. Your husband set me at liberty, gave me a passport, ordered a carriage, and then, with the most boyish spirit, challenged me to fight. Knowing the nature of his married life, I thought the dash and loyalty he showed delightful. "Do not be afraid," says he; "if I am killed, there is nobody to miss me." It appears you

subsequently thought of that yourself. But I digress. I explained to him it was impossible that I could fight! "Not if I strike you?" says he. Very droll; I wish I could have put it in my book. However, I was conquered, took the young gentleman to my high favour, and tore up my bits of scandal on the spot. That is one of the little favours, madam, that you owe your husband.'

Seraphina sat for some while in silence. She could bear to be misjudged without a pang by those whom she contemned; she had none of Otto's eagerness to be approved, but went her own way straight and head in air. To Sir John, however, after what he had said, and as her husband's friend, she was prepared to stoop.

'What do you think of me?' she asked abruptly.

'I have told you already,' said Sir John: 'I think you want another glass of my good wine.'

'Come,' she said, 'this is unlike you. You are not wont to be afraid. You say that you admire my husband: in his name, be honest.'

'I admire your courage,' said the Baronet. 'Beyond that, as you have guessed, and indeed said, our natures are not sympathetic.'

'You spoke of scandal,' pursued Seraphina. 'Was the scandal great?'

'It was considerable,' said Sir John.

‘And you believed it?’ she demanded.

‘O, madam,’ said Sir John, ‘the question!’

‘Thank you for that answer!’ cried Seraphina. ‘And now here, I will tell you, upon my honour, upon my soul, in spite of all the scandal in this world, I am as true a wife as ever stood.’

‘We should probably not agree upon a definition,’ observed Sir John.

‘O!’ she cried, ‘I have abominably used him—I know that; it is not that I mean. But if you admire my husband, I insist that you shall understand me: I can look him in the face without a blush.’

‘It may be, madam,’ said Sir John; ‘nor have I presumed to think the contrary.’

‘You will not believe me?’ she cried. ‘You think I am a guilty wife? You think he was my lover?’

‘Madam,’ returned the Baronet, ‘when I tore up my papers, I promised your good husband to concern myself no more with your affairs; and I assure you for the last time that I have no desire to judge you.’

‘But you will not acquit me! Ah!’ she cried, ‘he will—he knows me better!’

Sir John smiled.

'You smile at my distress?' asked Seraphina.

'At your woman's coolness,' said Sir John. 'A man would scarce have had the courage of that cry, which was, for all that, very natural, and I make no doubt quite true. But remark, madam—since you do me the honour to consult me gravely—I have no pity for what you call your distresses. You have been completely selfish, and now reap the consequence. Had you once thought of your husband, instead of singly thinking of yourself, you would not now have been alone, a fugitive, with blood upon your hands, and hearing from a morose old Englishman truth more bitter than scandal.'

'I thank you,' she said, quivering. 'This is very true. Will you stop the carriage?'

'No, child,' said Sir John, 'not until I see you mistress of yourself.'

There was a long pause, during which the carriage rolled by rock and woodland.

'And now,' she resumed, with perfect steadiness, 'will you consider me composed? I request you, as a gentleman, to let me out.'

'I think you do unwisely,' he replied. 'Continue, if you please, to use

my carriage.'

'Sir John,' she said, 'if death were sitting on that pile of stones, I would alight! I do not blame, I thank you; I now know how I appear to others; but sooner than draw breath beside a man who can so think of me, I would—O!' she cried, and was silent.

Sir John pulled the string, alighted, and offered her his hand; but she refused the help.

The road had now issued from the valleys in which it had been winding, and come to that part of its course where it runs, like a cornice, along the brow of the steep northward face of Grünewald. The place where they had alighted was at a salient angle; a bold rock and some wind-tortured pine-trees overhung it from above; far below the blue plains lay forth and melted into heaven; and before them the road, by a succession of bold zigzags, was seen mounting to where a tower upon a tall cliff closed the view.

'There,' said the Baronet, pointing to the tower, 'you see the Felsenburg, your goal. I wish you a good journey, and regret I cannot be of more assistance.'

He mounted to his place and gave a signal, and the carriage rolled away.

Seraphina stood by the wayside, gazing before her with blind eyes. Sir John she had dismissed already from her mind: she hated him, that was

enough; for whatever Seraphina hated or contemned fell instantly to Lilliputian smallness, and was thenceforward steadily ignored in thought. And now she had matter for concern indeed. Her interview with Otto, which she had never yet forgiven him, began to appear before her in a very different light. He had come to her, still thrilling under recent insult, and not yet breathed from fighting her own cause; and how that knowledge changed the value of his words! Yes, he must have loved her! this was a brave feeling—it was no mere weakness of the will. And she, was she incapable of love? It would appear so; and she swallowed her tears, and yearned to see Otto, to explain all, to ask pity upon her knees for her transgressions, and, if all else were now beyond the reach of reparation, to restore at least the liberty of which she had deprived him.

Swiftly she sped along the highway, and, as the road wound out and in about the bluffs and gullies of the mountain, saw and lost by glimpses the tall tower that stood before and above her, purpled by the mountain air.

CHAPTER II—TREATS OF A CHRISTIAN VIRTUE

When Otto mounted to his rolling prison he found another occupant in a corner of the front seat; but as this person hung his head and the brightness of the carriage lamps shone outward, the Prince could only see it was a man. The Colonel followed his prisoner and clapped-to the door; and at that the four horses broke immediately into a swinging trot.

'Gentlemen,' said the Colonel, after some little while had passed, 'if we are to travel in silence, we might as well be at home. I appear, of course, in an invidious character; but I am a man of taste, fond of books and solidly informing talk, and unfortunately condemned for life to the guard-room. Gentlemen, this is my chance: don't spoil it for me. I have here the pick of the whole court, barring lovely woman; I have a great author in the person of the Doctor—'

'Gotthold!' cried Otto.

'It appears,' said the Doctor bitterly, 'that we must go together. Your Highness had not calculated upon that.'

'What do you infer?' cried Otto; 'that I had you arrested?'

'The inference is simple,' said the Doctor.

'Colonel Gordon,' said the Prince, 'oblige me so far, and set me right with Herr von Hohenstockwitz.'

'Gentlemen,' said the Colonel, 'you are both arrested on the same warrant in the name of the Princess Seraphina, acting regent, countersigned by Prime Minister Freiherr von Gondremark, and dated the day before yesterday, the twelfth. I reveal to you the secrets of the prison-house,' he added.

'Otto,' said Gotthold, 'I ask you to pardon my suspicions.'

'Gotthold,' said the Prince, 'I am not certain I can grant you that.'

'Your Highness is, I am sure, far too magnanimous to hesitate,' said the Colonel. 'But allow me: we speak at home in my religion of the means of grace: and I now propose to offer them.' So saying, the Colonel lighted a bright lamp which he attached to one side of the carriage, and from below the front seat produced a goodly basket adorned with the long necks of bottles. 'Tu spem reducis—how does it go, Doctor?' he asked gaily. 'I am, in a sense, your host; and I am sure you are both far too considerate of my embarrassing position to refuse to do me honour. Gentlemen, I drink to the Prince!'

'Colonel,' said Otto, 'we have a jovial entertainer. I drink to Colonel Gordon.'

Thereupon all three took their wine very pleasantly; and even as they did

so, the carriage with a lurch turned into the high-road and began to make better speed.

All was bright within; the wine had coloured Gotthold's cheek; dim forms of forest trees, dwindling and spiring, scarves of the starry sky, now wide and now narrow, raced past the windows, through one that was left open the air of the woods came in with a nocturnal raciness; and the roll of wheels and the tune of the trotting horses sounded merrily on the ear. Toast followed toast; glass after glass was bowed across and emptied by the trio; and presently there began to fall upon them a luxurious spell, under the influence of which little but the sound of quiet and confidential laughter interrupted the long intervals of meditative silence.

'Otto,' said Gotthold, after one of these seasons of quiet, 'I do not ask you to forgive me. Were the parts reversed, I could not forgive you.'

'Well,' said Otto, 'it is a phrase we use. I do forgive you, but your words and your suspicions rankle; and not yours alone. It is idle, Colonel Gordon, in view of the order you are carrying out, to conceal from you the dissensions of my family; they have gone so far that they are now public property. Well, gentlemen, can I forgive my wife? I can, of course, and do; but in what sense? I would certainly not stoop to any revenge; as certainly I could not think of her but as one changed beyond my recognition.'

'Allow me,' returned the Colonel. 'You will permit me to hope that I am

addressing Christians? We are all conscious, I trust, that we are miserable sinners.'

'I disown the consciousness,' said Gotthold. 'Warmed with this good fluid, I deny your thesis.'

'How, sir? You never did anything wrong? and I heard you asking pardon but this moment, not of your God, sir, but of a common fellow-worm!' the Colonel cried.

'I own you have me; you are expert in argument, Herr Oberst,' said the Doctor.

'Begad, sir, I am proud to hear you say so,' said the Colonel. 'I was well grounded indeed at Aberdeen. And as for this matter of forgiveness, it comes, sir, of loose views and (what is if anything more dangerous) a regular life. A sound creed and a bad morality, that's the root of wisdom. You two gentlemen are too good to be forgiving.'

'The paradox is somewhat forced,' said Gotthold.

'Pardon me, Colonel,' said the Prince; 'I readily acquit you of any design of offence, but your words bite like satire. Is this a time, do you think, when I can wish to hear myself called good, now that I am paying the penalty (and am willing like yourself to think it just) of my prolonged misconduct?'

'O, pardon me!' cried the Colonel. 'You have never been expelled from the divinity hall; you have never been broke. I was: broke for a neglect of military duty. To tell you the open truth, your Highness, I was the worse of drink; it's a thing I never do now,' he added, taking out his glass. 'But a man, you see, who has really tasted the defects of his own character, as I have, and has come to regard himself as a kind of blind teetotum knocking about life, begins to learn a very different view about forgiveness. I will talk of not forgiving others, sir, when I have made out to forgive myself, and not before; and the date is like to be a long one. My father, the Reverend Alexander Gordon, was a good man, and damned hard upon others. I am what they call a bad one, and that is just the difference. The man who cannot forgive any mortal thing is a green hand in life.'

'And yet I have heard of you, Colonel, as a duellist,' said Gotthold.

'A different thing, sir,' replied the soldier. 'Professional etiquette. And I trust without unchristian feeling.'

Presently after the Colonel fell into a deep sleep and his companions looked upon each other, smiling.

'An odd fish,' said Gotthold.

'And a strange guardian,' said the Prince. 'Yet what he said was true.'

'Rightly looked upon,' mused Gotthold, 'it is ourselves that we cannot

forgive, when we refuse forgiveness to our friend. Some strand of our own misdoing is involved in every quarrel.'

'Are there not offences that disgrace the pardoner?' asked Otto. 'Are there not bounds of self-respect?'

'Otto,' said Gotthold, 'does any man respect himself? To this poor waif of a soldier of fortune we may seem respectable gentlemen; but to ourselves, what are we unless a pasteboard portico and a deliquium of deadly weaknesses within?'

'I? yes,' said Otto; 'but you, Gotthold—you, with your interminable industry, your keen mind, your books—serving mankind, scorning pleasures and temptations! You do not know how I envy you.'

'Otto,' said the Doctor, 'in one word, and a bitter one to say: I am a secret tippler. Yes, I drink too much. The habit has robbed these very books, to which you praise my devotion, of the merits that they should have had. It has spoiled my temper. When I spoke to you the other day, how much of my warmth was in the cause of virtue? how much was the fever
of last night's wine? Ay, as my poor fellow-sot there said, and as I vaingloriously denied, we are all miserable sinners, put here for a moment, knowing the good, choosing the evil, standing naked and ashamed in the eye of God.'

'Is it so?' said Otto. 'Why, then, what are we? Are the very best—'

'There is no best in man,' said Gotthold. 'I am not better, it is likely I am not worse, than you or that poor sleeper. I was a sham, and now you know me: that is all.'

'And yet it has not changed my love,' returned Otto softly. 'Our misdeeds do not change us. Gotthold, fill your glass. Let us drink to what is good in this bad business; let us drink to our old affection; and, when we have done so, forgive your too just grounds of offence, and drink with me to my wife, whom I have so misused, who has so misused me, and whom I have left, I fear, I greatly fear, in danger. What matters it how bad we are, if others can still love us, and we can still love others?'

'Ay!' replied the Doctor. 'It is very well said. It is the true answer to the pessimist, and the standing miracle of mankind. So you still love me? and so you can forgive your wife? Why, then, we may bid conscience "Down, dog," like an ill-trained puppy yapping at shadows.'

The pair fell into silence, the Doctor tapping on his empty glass.

The carriage swung forth out of the valleys on that open balcony of high-road that runs along the front of Grünewald, looking down on Gerolstein. Far below, a white waterfall was shining to the stars from the falling skirts of forest, and beyond that, the night stood naked above the plain. On the other hand, the lamp-light skimmed the face of the precipices, and the dwarf pine-trees twinkled with all their needles,

and were gone again into the wake. The granite roadway thundered under wheels and hoofs; and at times, by reason of its continual winding, Otto could see the escort on the other side of a ravine, riding well together in the night. Presently the Felsenburg came plainly in view, some way above them, on a bold projection of the mountain, and planting its bulk against the starry sky.

'See, Gotthold,' said the Prince, 'our destination.'

Gotthold awoke as from a trance.

'I was thinking,' said he, 'if there is any danger, why did you not resist? I was told you came of your free will; but should you not be there to help her?'

The colour faded from the Prince's cheeks.

CHAPTER III—PROVIDENCE VON ROSEN: ACT THE LAST
IN WHICH SHE GALLOPS OFF

When the busy Countess came forth from her interview with Seraphina, it is not too much to say that she was beginning to be terribly afraid. She paused in the corridor and reckoned up her doings with an eye to Gondremark. The fan was in requisition in an instant; but her disquiet was beyond the reach of fanning. 'The girl has lost her head,' she thought; and then dismally, 'I have gone too far.' She instantly decided on secession. Now the Mons Sacer of the Frau von Rosen was a certain rustic villa in the forest, called by herself, in a smart attack of poesy, Tannen Zauber, and by everybody else plain Kleinbrunn.

Thither, upon the thought, she furiously drove, passing Gondremark at the entrance to the Palace avenue, but feigning not to observe him; and as Kleinbrunn was seven good miles away, and in the bottom of a narrow dell, she passed the night without any rumour of the outbreak reaching her; and the glow of the conflagration was concealed by intervening hills. Frau von Rosen did not sleep well; she was seriously uneasy as to the results of her delightful evening, and saw herself condemned to quite a lengthy sojourn in her deserts and a long defensive correspondence, ere she could venture to return to Gondremark. On the other hand, she examined, by way of pastime, the deeds she had received from Otto; and even here saw cause for disappointment. In these troublous days she had no taste for landed property, and she was convinced, besides, that Otto had paid dearer than

the farm was worth. Lastly, the order for the Prince's release fairly burned her meddling fingers.

All things considered, the next day beheld an elegant and beautiful lady, in a riding-habit and a flapping hat, draw bridle at the gate of the Felsenburg, not perhaps with any clear idea of her purpose, but with her usual experimental views on life. Governor Gordon, summoned to the gate, welcomed the omnipotent Countess with his most gallant bearing, though it was wonderful how old he looked in the morning.

'Ah, Governor,' she said, 'we have surprises for you, sir,' and nodded at him meaningly.

'Eh, madam, leave me my prisoners,' he said; 'and if you will but join the band, begad, I'll be happy for life.'

'You would spoil me, would you not?' she asked.

'I would try, I would try,' returned the Governor, and he offered her his arm.

She took it, picked up her skirt, and drew him close to her. 'I have come to see the Prince,' she said. 'Now, infidel! on business. A message from that stupid Gondremark, who keeps me running like a courier.
Do I look like one, Herr Gordon?' And she planted her eyes in him.

'You look like an angel, ma'am,' returned the Governor, with a great air of finished gallantry.

The Countess laughed. 'An angel on horseback!' she said. 'Quick work.'

'You came, you saw, you conquered,' flourished Gordon, in high good humour with his own wit and grace. 'We toasted you, madam, in the carriage, in an excellent good glass of wine; toasted you fathom deep; the finest woman, with, begad, the finest eyes in Grünewald. I never saw the like of them but once, in my own country, when I was a young fool at College: Thomasina Haig her name was. I give you my word of honour, she was as like you as two peas.'

'And so you were merry in the carriage?' asked the Countess, gracefully dissembling a yawn.

'We were; we had a very pleasant conversation; but we took perhaps a glass more than that fine fellow of a Prince has been accustomed to,' said the Governor; 'and I observe this morning that he seems a little off his mettle. We'll get him mellow again ere bedtime. This is his door.'

'Well,' she whispered, 'let me get my breath. No, no; wait. Have the door ready to open.' And the Countess, standing like one inspired, shook out her fine voice in 'Lascia ch'io pianga'; and when she had reached the proper point, and lyrically uttered forth her sighings after liberty, the door, at a sign, was flung wide open, and she swam into the Prince's sight, bright-eyed, and with her colour somewhat freshened by the

exercise of singing. It was a great dramatic entrance, and to the somewhat doleful prisoner within the sight was sunshine.

'Ah, madam,' he cried, running to her—'you here!'

She looked meaningly at Gordon; and as soon as the door was closed she fell on Otto's neck. 'To see you here!' she moaned and clung to him.

But the Prince stood somewhat stiffly in that enviable situation, and the Countess instantly recovered from her outburst.

'Poor child,' she said, 'poor child! Sit down beside me here, and tell me all about it. My heart really bleeds to see you. How does time go?'

'Madam,' replied the Prince, sitting down beside her, his gallantry recovered, 'the time will now go all too quickly till you leave. But I must ask you for the news. I have most bitterly condemned myself for my inertia of last night. You wisely counselled me; it was my duty to resist. You wisely and nobly counselled me; I have since thought of it with wonder. You have a noble heart.'

'Otto,' she said, 'spare me. Was it even right, I wonder? I have duties, too, you poor child; and when I see you they all melt—all my good resolutions fly away.'

'And mine still come too late,' he replied, sighing. 'O, what would I not give to have resisted? What would I not give for freedom?'

'Well, what would you give?' she asked; and the red fan was spread; only her eyes, as if from over battlements, brightly surveyed him.

'I? What do you mean? Madam, you have some news for me,' he cried.

'O, O!' said madam dubiously.

He was at her feet. 'Do not trifle with my hopes,' he pleaded. 'Tell me, dearest Madame von Rosen, tell me! You cannot be cruel: it is not in your nature. Give? I can give nothing; I have nothing; I can only plead in mercy.'

'Do not,' she said; 'it is not fair. Otto, you know my weakness. Spare me. Be generous.'

'O, madam,' he said, 'it is for you to be generous, to have pity.' He took her hand and pressed it; he plied her with caresses and appeals. The Countess had a most enjoyable sham siege, and then relented. She sprang to her feet, she tore her dress open, and, all warm from her bosom, threw the order on the floor.

'There!' she cried. 'I forced it from her. Use it, and I am ruined!' And she turned away as if to veil the force of her emotions.

Otto sprang upon the paper, read it, and cried out aloud. 'O, God bless her!' he said, 'God bless her.' And he kissed the writing.

Von Rosen was a singularly good-natured woman, but her part was now beyond her. 'Ingrate!' she cried; 'I wrung it from her, I betrayed my trust to get it, and 'tis she you thank!'

'Can you blame me?' said the Prince. 'I love her.'

'I see that,' she said. 'And I?'

'You, Madame von Rosen? You are my dearest, my kindest, and most generous of friends,' he said, approaching her. 'You would be a perfect friend, if you were not so lovely. You have a great sense of humour, you cannot be unconscious of your charm, and you amuse yourself at times by playing on my weakness; and at times I can take pleasure in the comedy. But not to-day: to-day you will be the true, the serious, the manly friend, and you will suffer me to forget that you are lovely and that I am weak. Come, dear Countess, let me to-day repose in you entirely.'

He held out his hand, smiling, and she took it frankly. 'I vow you have bewitched me,' she said; and then with a laugh, 'I break my staff!' she added; 'and I must pay you my best compliment. You made a difficult speech. You are as adroit, dear Prince, as I am—charming.' And as she said the word with a great curtsey, she justified it.

'You hardly keep the bargain, madam, when you make yourself so beautiful,' said the Prince, bowing.

'It was my last arrow,' she returned. 'I am disarmed. Blank cartridge, O mon Prince! And now I tell you, if you choose to leave this prison, you can, and I am ruined. Choose!'

'Madame von Rosen,' replied Otto, 'I choose, and I will go. My duty points me, duty still neglected by this Featherhead. But do not fear to be a loser. I propose instead that you should take me with you, a bear in chains, to Baron Gondremark. I am become perfectly unscrupulous: to save my wife I will do all, all he can ask or fancy. He shall be filled; were he huge as leviathan and greedy as the grave, I will content him. And you, the fairy of our pantomime, shall have the credit.'

'Done!' she cried. 'Admirable! Prince Charming no longer—Prince Sorcerer, Prince Solon! Let us go this moment. Stay,' she cried, pausing. 'I beg dear Prince, to give you back these deeds. 'Twas you who liked the farm—I have not seen it; and it was you who wished to benefit the peasants. And, besides,' she added, with a comical change of tone, 'I should prefer the ready money.'

Both laughed. 'Here I am, once more a farmer,' said Otto, accepting the papers, 'but overwhelmed in debt.'

The Countess touched a bell, and the Governor appeared.

'Governor,' she said, 'I am going to elope with his Highness. The result of our talk has been a thorough understanding, and the coup d'état is over. Here is the order.'

Colonel Gordon adjusted silver spectacles upon his nose. 'Yes,' he said, 'the Princess: very right. But the warrant, madam, was countersigned.'

'By Heinrich!' said von Rosen. 'Well, and here am I to represent him.'

'Well, your Highness,' resumed the soldier of fortune, 'I must congratulate you upon my loss. You have been cut out by beauty, and I am left lamenting. The Doctor still remains to me: probus, doctus, lepidus, jucundus: a man of books.'

'Ay, there is nothing about poor Gotthold,' said the Prince.

'The Governor's consolation? Would you leave him bare?' asked von Rosen.

'And, your Highness,' resumed Gordon, 'may I trust that in the course of this temporary obscuration, you have found me discharge my part with suitable respect and, I may add, tact? I adopted purposely a cheerfulness of manner; mirth, it appeared to me, and a good glass of wine, were the fit alleviations.'

'Colonel,' said Otto, holding out his hand, 'your society was of itself enough. I do not merely thank you for your pleasant spirits; I have to thank you, besides, for some philosophy, of which I stood in need. I trust I do not see you for the last time; and in the meanwhile, as a memento of our strange acquaintance, let me offer you these verses on which I was but now engaged. I am so little of a poet, and was so ill

inspired by prison bars, that they have some claim to be at least a curiosity.'

The Colonel's countenance lighted as he took the paper; the silver spectacles were hurriedly replaced. 'Ha!' he said, 'Alexandrines, the tragic metre. I shall cherish this, your Highness, like a relic; no more suitable offering, although I say it, could be made. "Dieux de l'immense plaine et des vastes forêts." Very good,' he said, 'very good indeed! "Et du geôlier lui-même apprendre des leçons." Most handsome, begad!'

'Come, Governor,' cried the Countess, 'you can read his poetry when we are gone. Open your grudging portals.'

'I ask your pardon,' said the Colonel. 'To a man of my character and tastes, these verses, this handsome reference—most moving, I assure you. Can I offer you an escort?'

'No, no,' replied the Countess. 'We go incogniti, as we arrived. We ride together; the Prince will take my servant's horse. Hurry and privacy, Herr Oberst, that is all we seek.' And she began impatiently to lead the way.

But Otto had still to bid farewell to Dr. Gotthold; and the Governor following, with his spectacles in one hand and the paper in the other, had still to communicate his treasured verses, piece by piece, as he succeeded in deciphering the manuscript, to all he came across; and still his enthusiasm mounted. 'I declare,' he cried at last, with the air of

one who has at length divined a mystery, 'they remind me of Robbie Burns!'

But there is an end to all things; and at length Otto was walking by the side of Madame von Rosen, along that mountain wall, her servant following with both the horses, and all about them sunlight, and breeze, and flying bird, and the vast regions of the air, and the capacious prospect: wildwood and climbing pinnacle, and the sound and voice of mountain torrents, at their hand: and far below them, green melting into sapphire on the plains.

They walked at first in silence; for Otto's mind was full of the delight of liberty and nature, and still, betweenwhiles, he was preparing his interview with Gondremark. But when the first rough promontory of the rock was turned, and the Felsenburg concealed behind its bulk, the lady paused.

'Here,' she said, 'I will dismount poor Karl, and you and I must ply our spurs. I love a wild ride with a good companion.'

As she spoke, a carriage came into sight round the corner next below them in the order of the road. It came heavily creaking, and a little ahead of it a traveller was soberly walking, note-book in hand.

'It is Sir John,' cried Otto, and he hailed him.

The Baronet pocketed his note-book, stared through an eye-glass, and then

waved his stick; and he on his side, and the Countess and the Prince on theirs, advanced with somewhat quicker steps. They met at the re-entrant angle, where a thin stream sprayed across a boulder and was scattered in rain among the brush; and the Baronet saluted the Prince with much punctilio. To the Countess, on the other hand, he bowed with a kind of sneering wonder.

'Is it possible, madam, that you have not heard the news?' he asked.

'What news?' she cried.

'News of the first order,' returned Sir John: 'a revolution in the State, a Republic declared, the palace burned to the ground, the Princess in flight, Gondremark wounded—'

'Heinrich wounded?' she screamed.

'Wounded and suffering acutely,' said Sir John. 'His groans—'

There fell from the lady's lips an oath so potent that, in smoother hours, it would have made her hearers jump. She ran to her horse, scrambled to the saddle, and, yet half seated, dashed down the road at full gallop. The groom, after a pause of wonder, followed her. The rush of her impetuous passage almost scared the carriage horses over the verge of the steep hill; and still she clattered further, and the crags echoed to her flight, and still the groom flogged vainly in pursuit of her. At the fourth corner, a woman trailing slowly up leaped back with a cry and

escaped death by a hand's-breadth. But the Countess wasted neither glance nor thought upon the incident. Out and in, about the bluffs of the mountain wall, she fled, loose-reined, and still the groom toiled in her pursuit.

'A most impulsive lady!' said Sir John. 'Who would have thought she cared for him?' And before the words were uttered, he was struggling in the Prince's grasp.

'My wife! the Princess? What of her?'

'She is down the road,' he gasped. 'I left her twenty minutes back.'

And next moment, the choked author stood alone, and the Prince on foot was racing down the hill behind the Countess.

CHAPTER IV—BABES IN THE WOOD

While the feet of the Prince continued to run swiftly, his heart, which had at first by far outstripped his running, soon began to linger and hang back. Not that he ceased to pity the misfortune or to yearn for the sight of Seraphina; but the memory of her obdurate coldness awoke within him, and woke in turn his own habitual diffidence of self. Had Sir John been given time to tell him all, had he even known that she was speeding to the Felsenburg, he would have gone to her with ardour. As it was, he began to see himself once more intruding, profiting, perhaps, by her misfortune, and now that she was fallen, proffering unloved caresses to the wife who had spurned him in prosperity. The sore spots upon his vanity began to burn; once more, his anger assumed the carriage of a hostile generosity; he would utterly forgive indeed; he would help, save, and comfort his unloving wife; but all with distant self-denial, imposing silence on his heart, respecting Seraphina's disaffection as he would the innocence of a child. So, when at length he turned a corner and beheld the Princess, it was his first thought to reassure her of the purity of his respect, and he at once ceased running and stood still. She, upon her part, began to run to him with a little cry; then, seeing him pause, she paused also, smitten with remorse; and at length, with the most guilty timidity, walked nearly up to where he stood.

'Otto,' she said, 'I have ruined all!'

‘Seraphina!’ he cried with a sob, but did not move, partly withheld by his resolutions, partly struck stupid at the sight of her weariness and disorder. Had she stood silent, they had soon been locked in an embrace. But she too had prepared herself against the interview, and must spoil the golden hour with protestations.

‘All!’ she went on, ‘I have ruined all! But, Otto, in kindness you must hear me—not justify, but own, my faults. I have been taught so cruelly; I have had such time for thought, and see the world so changed. I have been blind, stone-blind; I have let all true good go by me, and lived on shadows. But when this dream fell, and I had betrayed you, and thought I had killed—’ She paused. ‘I thought I had killed Gondremark,’ she said with a deep flush, ‘and I found myself alone, as you said.’

The mention of the name of Gondremark pricked the Princes generosity like a spur. ‘Well,’ he cried, ‘and whose fault was it but mine? It was my duty to be beside you, loved or not. But I was a skulker in the grain, and found it easier to desert than to oppose you. I could never learn that better part of love, to fight love’s battles. But yet the love was there. And now when this toy kingdom of ours has fallen, first of all by my demerits, and next by your inexperience, and we are here alone together, as poor as Job and merely a man and a woman—let me conjure you
to forgive the weakness and to repose in the love. Do not mistake me!’ he cried, seeing her about to speak, and imposing silence with uplifted hand. ‘My love is changed; it is purged of any conjugal pretension; it does not ask, does not hope, does not wish for a return in kind. You may

forget for ever that part in which you found me so distasteful, and accept without embarrassment the affection of a brother.'

'You are too generous, Otto,' she said. 'I know that I have forfeited your love. I cannot take this sacrifice. You had far better leave me. O, go away, and leave me to my fate!'

'O no!' said Otto; 'we must first of all escape out of this hornet's nest, to which I led you. My honour is engaged. I said but now we were as poor as Job; and behold! not many miles from here I have a house of my own to which I will conduct you. Otto the Prince being down, we must try what luck remains to Otto the Hunter. Come, Seraphina; show that you forgive me, and let us set about this business of escape in the best spirits possible. You used to say, my dear, that, except as a husband and a prince, I was a pleasant fellow. I am neither now, and you may like my company without remorse. Come, then; it were idle to be captured. Can you still walk? Forth, then,' said he, and he began to lead the way.

A little below where they stood, a good-sized brook passed below the road, which overleapt it in a single arch. On one bank of that loquacious water a foot-path descended a green dell. Here it was rocky and stony, and lay on the steep scarps of the ravine; here it was choked with brambles; and there, in fairy haughs, it lay for a few paces evenly on the green turf. Like a sponge, the hillside oozed with well-water. The burn kept growing both in force and volume; at every leap it fell with heavier plunges and span more widely in the pool. Great had been

the labours of that stream, and great and agreeable the changes it had wrought. It had cut through dykes of stubborn rock, and now, like a blowing dolphin, spouted through the orifice; along all its humble coasts, it had undermined and rafted-down the goodlier timber of the forest; and on these rough clearings it now set and tended primrose gardens, and planted woods of willow, and made a favourite of the silver birch. Through all these friendly features the path, its human acolyte, conducted our two wanderers downward,—Otto before, still pausing at the more difficult passages to lend assistance; the Princess following. From time to time, when he turned to help her, her face would lighten upon his—her eyes, half desperately, woo him. He saw, but dared not understand. 'She does not love me,' he told himself, with magnanimity. 'This is remorse or gratitude; I were no gentleman, no, nor yet a man, if I presumed upon these pitiful concessions.'

Some way down the glen, the stream, already grown to a good bulk of water, was rudely dammed across, and about a third of it abducted in a wooden trough. Gaily the pure water, air's first cousin, fleeted along the rude aqueduct, whose sides and floor it had made green with grasses. The path, bearing it close company, threaded a wilderness of briar and wild-rose. And presently, a little in front, the brown top of a mill and the tall mill-wheel, spraying diamonds, arose in the narrows of the glen; at the same time the snoring music of the saws broke the silence.

The miller, hearing steps, came forth to his door, and both he and Otto started.

'Good-morning, miller,' said the Prince. 'You were right, it seems, and I was wrong. I give you the news, and bid you to Mittwalden. My throne has fallen—great was the fall of it!—and your good friends of the Phoenix bear the rule.'

The red-faced miller looked supreme astonishment. 'And your Highness?' he gasped.

'My Highness is running away,' replied Otto, 'straight for the frontier.'

'Leaving Grünewald?' cried the man. 'Your father's son? It's not to be permitted!'

'Do you arrest us, friend?' asked Otto, smiling.

'Arrest you? I?' exclaimed the man. 'For what does your Highness take me? Why, sir, I make sure there is not a man in Grünewald would lay hands upon you.'

'O, many, many,' said the Prince; 'but from you, who were bold with me in my greatness, I should even look for aid in my distress.'

The miller became the colour of beetroot. 'You may say so indeed,' said he. 'And meanwhile, will you and your lady step into my house.'

'We have not time for that,' replied the Prince; 'but if you would oblige us with a cup of wine without here, you will give a pleasure and a

service, both in one.'

The miller once more coloured to the nape. He hastened to bring forth wine in a pitcher and three bright crystal tumblers. 'Your Highness must not suppose,' he said, as he filled them, 'that I am an habitual drinker. The time when I had the misfortune to encounter you, I was a trifle overtaken, I allow; but a more sober man than I am in my ordinary, I do not know where you are to look for; and even this glass that I drink to you (and to the lady) is quite an unusual recreation.'

The wine was drunk with due rustic courtesies; and then, refusing further hospitality, Otto and Seraphina once more proceeded to descend the glen, which now began to open and to be invaded by the taller trees.

'I owed that man a reparation,' said the Prince; 'for when we met I was in the wrong and put a sore affront upon him. I judge by myself, perhaps; but I begin to think that no one is the better for a humiliation.'

'But some have to be taught so,' she replied.

'Well, well,' he said, with a painful embarrassment. 'Well, well. But let us think of safety. My miller is all very good, but I do not pin my faith to him. To follow down this stream will bring us, but after innumerable windings, to my house. Here, up this glade, there lies a cross-cut—the world's end for solitude—the very deer scarce visit it. Are you too tired, or could you pass that way?'

‘Choose the path, Otto. I will follow you,’ she said.

‘No,’ he replied, with a singular imbecility of manner and appearance, ‘but I meant the path was rough. It lies, all the way, by glade and dingle, and the dingles are both deep and thorny.’

‘Lead on,’ she said. ‘Are you not Otto the Hunter?’

They had now burst across a veil of underwood, and were come into a lawn among the forest, very green and innocent, and solemnly surrounded by trees. Otto paused on the margin, looking about him with delight; then his glance returned to Seraphina, as she stood framed in that silvan pleasantness and looking at her husband with undecipherable eyes. A weakness both of the body and mind fell on him like the beginnings of sleep; the cords of his activity were relaxed, his eyes clung to her.
‘Let us rest,’ he said; and he made her sit down, and himself sat down beside her on the slope of an inconsiderable mound.

She sat with her eyes downcast, her slim hand dabbling in grass, like a maid waiting for love’s summons. The sound of the wind in the forest swelled and sank, and drew near them with a running rush, and died away and away in the distance into fainting whispers. Nearer hand, a bird out of the deep covert uttered broken and anxious notes. All this seemed but a halting prelude to speech. To Otto it seemed as if the whole frame of nature were waiting for his words; and yet his pride kept him silent.
The longer he watched that slender and pale hand plucking at the grasses,

the harder and rougher grew the fight between pride and its kindly adversary.

'Seraphina,' he said at last, 'it is right you should know one thing: I never . . .' He was about to say 'doubted you,' but was that true? And, if true, was it generous to speak of it? Silence succeeded.

'I pray you, tell it me,' she said; 'tell it me, in pity.'

'I mean only this,' he resumed, 'that I understand all, and do not blame you. I understand how the brave woman must look down on the weak man. I think you were wrong in some things; but I have tried to understand it, and I do. I do not need to forget or to forgive, Seraphina, for I have understood.'

'I know what I have done,' she said. 'I am not so weak that I can be deceived with kind speeches. I know what I have been—I see myself. I am not worth your anger, how much less to be forgiven! In all this downfall and misery, I see only me and you: you, as you have been always; me, as I was—me, above all! O yes, I see myself: and what can I think?'

'Ah, then, let us reverse the parts!' said Otto. 'It is ourselves we cannot forgive, when we deny forgiveness to another—so a friend told me last night. On these terms, Seraphina, you see how generously I have forgiven myself. But am not I to be forgiven? Come, then, forgive yourself—and me.'

She did not answer in words, but reached out her hand to him quickly. He took it; and as the smooth fingers settled and nestled in his, love ran to and fro between them in tender and transforming currents.

'Seraphina,' he cried, 'O, forget the past! Let me serve and help you; let me be your servant; it is enough for me to serve you and to be near you; let me be near you, dear—do not send me away.' He hurried his pleading like the speech of a frightened child. 'It is not love,' he went on; 'I do not ask for love; my love is enough . . .'

'Otto!' she said, as if in pain.

He looked up into her face. It was wrung with the very ecstasy of tenderness and anguish; on her features, and most of all in her changed eyes, there shone the very light of love.

'Seraphina?' he cried aloud, and with a sudden, tuneless voice, 'Seraphina?'

'Look round you at this glade,' she cried, 'and where the leaves are coming on young trees, and the flowers begin to blossom. This is where we meet, meet for the first time; it is so much better to forget and to be born again. O what a pit there is for sins—God's mercy, man's oblivion!'

'Seraphina,' he said, 'let it be so, indeed; let all that was be merely

the abuse of dreaming; let me begin again, a stranger. I have dreamed, in a long dream, that I adored a girl unkind and beautiful; in all things my superior, but still cold, like ice. And again I dreamed, and thought she changed and melted, glowed and turned to me. And I—who had no merit
but a love, slavish and unerect—lay close, and durst not move for fear of waking.'

'Lie close,' she said, with a deep thrill of speech.

So they spake in the spring woods; and meanwhile, in Mittwalden Rath-haus, the Republic was declared.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL POSTSCRIPT TO COMPLETE THE STORY

The reader well informed in modern history will not require details as to the fate of the Republic. The best account is to be found in the memoirs of Herr Greisengesang (7 Bände: Leipzig), by our passing acquaintance the licentiate Roederer. Herr Roederer, with too much of an author's licence, makes a great figure of his hero—poses him, indeed, to be the centre-piece and cloud-compeller of the whole. But, with due allowance for this bias, the book is able and complete.

The reader is of course acquainted with the vigorous and bracing pages of Sir John (2 vols., London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown). Sir John, who plays but a tooth-comb in the orchestra of this historical romance, blows in his own book the big bassoon. His character is there drawn at large; and the sympathy of Landor has countersigned the admiration of the public. One point, however, calls for explanation; the chapter on Grünewald was torn by the hand of the author in the palace gardens; how comes it, then, to figure at full length among my more modest pages, the Lion of the caravan? That eminent literatus was a man of method; 'Juvenal by double entry,' he was once profanely called; and when he tore the sheets in question, it was rather, as he has since explained, in the search for some dramatic evidence of his sincerity, than with the thought of practical deletion. At that time, indeed, he was possessed of two blotted scrolls and a fair copy in double. But the chapter, as the reader knows, was honestly omitted from the famous 'Memoirs on the various Courts of Europe.' It has been mine to give it to the public.

Bibliography still helps us with a further glimpse of our characters. I have here before me a small volume (printed for private circulation: no printer's name; n.d.), 'Poésies par Frédéric et Amélie.' Mine is a presentation copy, obtained for me by Mr. Bain in the Haymarket; and the name of the first owner is written on the fly-leaf in the hand of Prince Otto himself. The modest epigraph—'Le rime n'est pas riche'—may be attributed, with a good show of likelihood, to the same collaborator. It is strikingly appropriate, and I have found the volume very dreary. Those pieces in which I seem to trace the hand of the Princess are

particularly dull and conscientious. But the booklet had a fair success with that public for which it was designed; and I have come across some evidences of a second venture of the same sort, now unprocurable. Here, at least, we may take leave of Otto and Seraphina—what do I say? of Frédéric and Amélie—ageing together peaceably at the court of the wife's father, jingling French rhymes and correcting joint proofs.

Still following the book-lists, I perceive that Mr. Swinburne has dedicated a rousing lyric and some vigorous sonnets to the memory of Gondremark; that name appears twice at least in Victor Hugo's trumpet-blasts of patriot enumeration; and I came latterly, when I supposed my task already ended, on a trace of the fallen politician and his Countess. It is in the 'Diary of J. Hogg Cotterill, Esq.' (that very interesting work). Mr. Cotterill, being at Naples, is introduced (May 27th) to 'a Baron and Baroness Gondremark—he a man who once made a noise—she still beautiful—both witty. She complimented me much upon my French—should never have known me to be English—had known my uncle, Sir

John, in Germany—recognised in me, as a family trait, some of his grand air and studious courtesy—asked me to call.' And again (May 30th), 'visited the Baronne de Gondremark—much gratified—a most refined, intelligent woman, quite of the old school, now, hélas! extinct—had read my Remarks on Sicily—it reminds her of my uncle, but with more of grace—I feared she thought there was less energy—assured no—a softer style of presentation, more of the literary grace, but the same firm grasp of circumstance and force of thought—in short, just Buttonhole's opinion. Much encouraged. I have a real esteem for this patrician

lady.’ The acquaintance lasted some time; and when Mr. Cotterill left in the suite of Lord Protocol, and, as he is careful to inform us, in Admiral Yardarm’s flag-ship, one of his chief causes of regret is to leave ‘that most spirituelle and sympathetic lady, who already regards me as a younger brother.’