

CHAPTER XXIV.

SENTIMENT v. SENSIBILITY.

The poet has feelingly sung the condition of

"The banquet hall deserted,
Whose lights are fled, and garlands dead," &c.,

and so we need not cast the daylight of minute description on the Follingsbee mansion.

Charlie Ferrola, however, was summoned away at early daylight, just as the last of the revellers were dispersing, by a hurried messenger from his wife; and, a few moments after he entered his house, he was standing beside his dying baby,--the little fellow whom we have seen brought down on Mrs. Ferrola's arm, to greet the call of Mrs. Follingsbee.

It is an awful thing for people of the flimsy, vain, pain-shunning, pleasure-seeking character of Charlie Ferrola, to be taken at times, as such people will be, in the grip of an inexorable power, and held face to face with the sternest, the most awful, the most frightful realities of life. Charlie Ferrola was one of those whose softness and pitifulness, like that of sentimentalists generally, was only one form

of intense selfishness. The sight of suffering pained him; and his first impulse was to get out of the way of it. Suffering that he did not see was nothing to him; and, if his wife or children were in any trouble, he would have liked very well to have known nothing about it.

But here he was, by the bedside of this little creature, dying in the agonies of slow suffocation, rolling up its dark, imploring eyes, and lifting its poor little helpless hands; and Charlie Ferrola broke out into the most violent and extravagant demonstrations of grief.

The pale, firm little woman, who had watched all night, and in whose tranquil face a light as if from heaven was beaming, had to assume the care of him, in addition to that of her dying child. He was another helpless burden on her hands.

There came a day when the house was filled with white flowers, and people came and went, and holy words were spoken; and the fairest flower of all was carried out, to return to the house no more.

"That woman is a most unnatural and peculiar woman!" said Mrs. Follingsbee, who had been most active and patronizing in sending flowers, and attending to the scenic arrangements of the funeral. "It is just what I always said: she is a perfect statue; she's no kind of feeling. There was Charlie, poor fellow! so sick that he had to go to bed, perfectly overcome, and have somebody to sit up with him; and there was that woman never shed a tear,--went round attending to every

thing, just like a piece of clock-work. Well, I suppose people are happier for being made so; people that have no sensibility are better fitted to get through the world. But, gracious me! I can't understand such people. There she stood at the grave, looking so calm, when Charlie was sobbing so that he could hardly hold himself up. Well, it really wasn't respectable. I think, at least, I would keep my veil down, and keep my handkerchief up. Poor Charlie! he came to me at last; and I gave way. I was completely broken down, I must confess. Poor fellow! he told me there was no conceiving his misery. That baby was the very idol of his soul; all his hopes of life were centred in it. He really felt tempted to rebel at Providence. He said that he really could not talk with his wife on the subject. He could not enter into her submission at all; it seemed to him like a want of feeling. He said of course it wasn't her fault that she was made one way and he another."

In fact, Mr. Charlie Ferrola took to the pink satin boudoir with a more languishing persistency than ever, requiring to be stayed with flagons, and comforted with apples, and receiving sentimental calls of condolence from fair admirers, made aware of the intense poignancy of his grief. A lovely poem, called "My Withered Blossom," which appeared in a fashionable magazine shortly after, was the out-come of this experience, and increased the fashionable sympathy to the highest degree.

Honest Mrs. Van Astrachan, however, though not acquainted with Mrs.

Ferrola, went to the funeral with Rose; and the next day her carriage was seen at Mrs. Ferrola's door.

"You poor little darling!" she said, as she came up and took Mrs. Ferrola in her arms. "You must let me come, and not mind me; for I know all about it. I lost the dearest little baby once; and I have never forgotten it. There! there, darling!" she said, as the little woman broke into sobs in her arms. "Yes, yes; do cry! it will do your little heart good."

There are people who, wherever they move, freeze the hearts of those they touch, and chill all demonstration of feeling; and there are warm natures, that unlock every fountain, and bid every feeling gush forth. The reader has seen these two types in this story.

"Wife," said Mr. Van Astrachan, coming to Mrs. V. confidentially a day or two after, "I wonder if you remember any of your French. What is a liaison?"

"Really, dear," said Mrs. Van Astrachan, whose reading of late years had been mostly confined to such memoirs as that of Mrs. Isabella Graham, Doddridge's "Rise and Progress," and Baxter's "Saint's Rest," "it's a great while since I read any French. What do you want to know for?"

"Well, there's Ben Stuyvesant was saying this morning, in Wall Street,

that there's a great deal of talk about that Mrs. Follingsbee and that young fellow whose baby's funeral you went to. Ben says there's a liaison between her and him. I didn't ask him what 'twas; but it's something or other with a French name that makes talk, and I don't think it's respectable! I'm sorry that you and Rose went to her party; but then that can't be helped now. I'm afraid this Mrs. Follingsbee is no sort of a woman, after all."

"But, pa, I've been to call on Mrs. Ferrola, poor little afflicted thing!" said Mrs. Van Astrachan. "I couldn't help it! You know how we felt when little Willie died."

"Oh, certainly, Polly! call on the poor woman by all means, and do all you can to comfort her; but, from all I can find out, that handsome jackanapes of a husband of hers is just the poorest trash going. They say this Follingsbee woman half supports him. The time was in New York when such doings wouldn't be allowed; and I don't think calling things by French names makes them a bit better. So you just be careful, and steer as clear of her as you can."

"I will, pa, just as clear as I can; but you know Rose is a friend of Mrs. John Seymour; and Mrs. Seymour is visiting at Mrs. Follingsbee's."

"Her husband oughtn't to let her stay there another day," said Mr. Van Astrachan. "It's as much as any woman's reputation is worth to be

staying with her. To think of that fellow being dancing and capering at that Jezebel's house the night his baby was dying!"

"Oh, but, pa, he didn't know it."

"Know it? he ought to have known it! What business has a man to get a woman with a lot of babies round her, and then go capering off?"

'Twasn't the way I did, Polly, you know, when our babies were young. I was always on the spot there, ready to take the baby, and walk up and down with it nights, so that you might get your sleep; and I always had it my side of the bed half the night. I'd like to have seen myself out at a ball, and you sitting up with a sick baby! I tell you, that if I caught any of my boys up to such tricks, I'd cut them out of my will, and settle the money on their wives;--that's what I would!"

"Well, pa, I shall try and do all in my power for poor Mrs. Ferrola," said Mrs. Van Astrachan; "and you may be quite sure I won't take another step towards Mrs. Follingsbee's acquaintance."

"It's a pity," said Mr. Van Astrachan, "that somebody couldn't put it into Mr. John Seymour's head to send for his wife home."

"I don't see, for my part, what respectable women want to be gallivanting and high-flying on their own separate account for, away from their husbands! Goods that are sold shouldn't go back to the shop-windows," said the good gentleman, all whose views of life were

of the most old-fashioned, domestic kind.

"Well, dear, we don't want to talk to Rose about any of this scandal," said his wife.

"No, no; it would be a pity to put any thing bad into a nice girl's head," said Mr. Van Astrachan. "You might caution her in a general way, you know; tell her, for instance, that I've heard of things that make me feel you ought to draw off. Why can't some bird of the air tell that little Seymour woman's husband to get her home?"

The little Seymour woman's husband, though not warned by any particular bird of the air, was not backward in taking steps for the recall of his wife, as shall hereafter appear.