

gest the answer, "Nothing? For did not Sally come to us out of the cloud, and could we do without her?"

But Rosalind's half-insight into the patchwork of her husband's perceptions warranted no step so decisive. Rather, if anything, it pointed to a gradual resumption of his *status quo* of a few days ago. After all, had he not had (and completely forgotten) recurrences like that of the Baron and the fly-wheel? Well, perhaps the last was a shade more vivid than the others. But then see now, had he not forgotten it already to all outward seeming?

So that the minds of the two of them worked to a common end—silence. Hers in the hope that the effects of the galvanic current—if that did it—would die away and leave him rest for his; his in the fear that behind the unraised curtain that still hid his early life from himself was hidden what might become a baleful power to breed unrest for hers.

But it all depended on his own mastery of himself. Except he told it, who should know that he was Harrison? And *how* he felt the shelter of the gold! Who was going to suspect that a man who could command wealth in six figures by disclosing his identity, would keep it a secret? And for his wife's sake too! A pitiful four- or five-figure man might—yes. But hundreds of thousands!—think of it!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

OF AN EXPEDITION AGAINST A GOODY, AND THE WALK BACK TO LOBJOIT'S. AND THE WALK BACK AGAIN TO IGGULDEN'S. HOW FENWICK TOOK VEREKER'S CONFIDENCE BY STORM. OF A COLLIER THAT PUT TO SEA. SUCCESSFUL AMBUSCADE OF THE OCTOPUS. PROVISIONAL EQUILIBRIUM OF FENWICK'S MIND. WHY BOTHER ABOUT HORACE? WHY NOT ABOUT PICKWICK JUST AS MUCH? THE KITTEN WASN'T THERE—CERTAINLY NOT!

So it came about that during the remainder of that day and part of the next Fenwick either made no further exploration of his past; or, if he did so, concealed his discoveries. For he not only kept silence with Rosalind, but even with Vereker was absolutely reserved, never alluding to their conversation of the morning. And the doctor accepted this reserve, and asked no questions.

As for Rosalind, she was only too glad to catch at the support of the medical authority and to abstain from question or suggestion; for the present certainly, and, unless her silence—as might be—should seem to imply a motive on her part, to maintain it until her husband revived the subject by disclosing further recollections of the bygone time. Happily Sally knew nothing about it; *that* her mother was convinced of. And Sally wasn't likely to know anything, for Vereker's professional discretion could be relied on, even if her suspicions were excited. And, really, except that Fenwick seemed a little drowsy and reflective, and that Rosalind had a semitone of consolation in her manner towards him, there was nothing to excite suspicion.

After the cows—this is an expression borrowed from Sally, later in the afternoon—conversation flagged through the rest of the walk home. Except for regrets, more than once expressed, that it would be much too late for tea when we got in, and a

passing word on the fact that at the seaside one got as greedy as some celebrated glutton—a Roman emperor, perhaps—very few ideas were interchanged. But a little conversation was made out of the scarcity of a good deal, for the persistent optimism of Sally recognised that it was awfully jolly saying nothing on such a lovely evening. Slight fatigue, combined with the beauty of sky and sea and distant downland, the lengthening shadows of the wheatsheaves, and the scarlet of poppies in the stubble, seemed good to justify contemplation and silence. It was an hour to caress in years to come, none the less that it was accepted as the mere routine of daily life in the short term of its existence. It was an hour that came to an end when the party arrived at the hedge of the unripe sloes that had checked the onset of Albion Villas towards the new town, and passed through the turnstile Fenwick and Vereker had passed through in the morning. Then speech came back, and each did what all folk invariably do after a long spell of silence—revealed what they were being silent about, or seemed to be. Most likely Fenwick's contribution was only a blind, as his mind must have been full of many thoughts he wished to keep to himself.

"I wonder when Paganini's young woman's row with her mother's going to come off—to-day or to-morrow?"

"I was wondering whether it would come off at all. I dare say she'll accept the inevitable." Thus Rosalind, and for our part we believe this also was not quite candid—in fact, was really suggested by her husband's remark. But Sally's was a genuine disclosure, and really showed what her mind had been running on.

"I've been meditating a Crusade," she said, with remoteness from current topics in her voice. And both her companions immediately made concessions to one that seemed to them genuine as compared with their own.

"Against whom, kitten?" said her mother.

And Fenwick reinforced her with, "Yes, who's the Crusade to be against, Sarah?"

"Against the Octopus." And Sally says this with the most perfectly unconscious gravity, as though a Crusade against an octopus was a very common occurrence in every-day life. The eyes of her companions twinkle a little interchange across her

unseen, but are careful to keep anything suggesting a smile out of their voices as they apply for enlightenment.

"Because of poor Prosy," Sally explains. "You'll see now. She won't allow him to come round this evening, you see if she does!" She is so intent upon her subject-matter that they might almost have smiled aloud without detection, after all.

"When's it to come off, Sarah—the Crusade?"

"I was thinking of going round this evening if he doesn't turn up."

"Suppose we all go," Fenwick suggests. And Rosalind assents. The Crusade may be considered organized. "We'll give him till eight-forty-five," Sally says, forecasting strategy, "and then if he doesn't come we'll go."

Eight-forty-five came, but no doctor. So the Crusade came off as arranged, with the result that the Christian forces, on arriving in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, found that the Octopus responsible for the personation of the Saracens had just gone to bed. It was an ill-advised Crusade, because if the Christians had only had a little patience, the released prisoner would have looked round as soon as his janitor was asleep. As it turned out, no sooner were the visitors' voices audible than the Octopus became alive to the pleasures of society, and renounced sleep in its favour. She would slip something on and come down, and did so. Her doing so was out of keeping with the leading idea of the performance, presenting the Paynim as an obliging race; but a meek and suffering one, though it never aired its grievances. These, however, were the chief subjects of conversation during the visit, which, in spite of every failure in dramatic propriety, was always spoken of in after days as "the Crusade." It came to an end in due course, the Saracen host retiring to bed, with benedictions.

Vereker walked back with our friends to Mrs. Lobjoit's through the sweet night-air a considerate little shower of rain, that came down while they were sympathetically engaged, had just washed clean. Vapour-drifts that were wavering between earth and sky, and sacrificing their birthright of either cloudship or foghood, were accompanying a warm sea-wind towards the north. Out beyond, and quite clear of all responsibility for them

and theirs, was a flawless heaven with the stellar and planetary universe in it, pitiless and passionless eyes perhaps—as Tennyson calls them—and strange fires; but in this case without power to burn and brand their nothingness into the visitors to St. Sennans, who laughed and talked and smoked and took no notice; and, indeed, rather than otherwise, considered that Cassiopeia and Aldebaran had been put there to make it a fine night for them to laugh and talk and smoke in.

It was pleasant to Vereker, after his walk with Fenwick in the morning, to find the latter like his usual cheerful self again. The doctor had had rather a trying time with his Goody mother, so that the day had been more one of tension than of peace, and it was a heavenly respite to him from filial duties dutifully borne, to walk home with the goddess of his paradise—the paradise that was so soon to come to an end and send him to the release of his “locum,” Mr. Neckitt. Never mind. The having such a time to look back to in the future was quite as much as one general practitioner, with a duty to his mother, could in reason expect. Was Dr. Conrad aware, we wonder, how much the philosophical resignation that made this attitude of thought possible was due to the absence of any other visible favoured applicant for Miss Sally, and the certainty that he would see her once or twice a week at least after he had gone back to his prescriptions and his diary of cases?

Probably he wasn't; and when, on arriving at Lobjoit's, Fenwick announced that he didn't want to go in yet, and would accompany the doctor back to Iggulden's and take a turn round, the only misgiving that could try for an insecure foothold in the mind now given up to a delirium it called Sally was one that Fenwick might have some new painful memory to tell. But he was soon at rest about this. Fenwick wasn't going to talk about himself. Very much the reverse, if one's own reverse is some one else. He was going to talk about the doctor, into whose arm he slipped his own as soon as he had lighted his second cigar. For they had not walked quick from Iggulden's.

“Now tell me about Sir Dioscorides Nayler and the epileptiform disorders.”

“Miss Sally's been telling you. . . .”

“No, she didn't—Sally did.” Both laughed. The doctor will

make it Sally next time—that's understood. “You told Sally and she told me. What's the damage to be?”

“How much did Sally tell you?” The little formality comes easier to the doctor's shyness as it figures, this time, quotation-wise. It is a repeat of Fenwick's use of it.

“Sally said three thousand.”

“Yes, that's what I told her. But it's not official. He may want more. He may let me have it for three. Only I don't know why I should have it for less than any one else.”

“Never you mind why! That's no concern of yours, my dear boy. What you've got to think of is of yourself and Mrs. Vereker. Dioscorides will take care of himself—trust him!”

“Yes, of course, I have to think of my mother.” One can hear in the speaker's voice what may be either self-reproach for having neglected this aspect of the case, or very tolerant indictment of Fenwick, for having mistakenly thought he had done so.

“What's the man thinking of? Of course you have, but I didn't mean your mother. She's a dear old lady”—this came grudgingly—“but I didn't mean her. I meant the Mrs. Vereker that's to come. Your wife, dear fellow, your wife.”

The way the young man flushed up, hesitated, stammered, couldn't organize a sane word, amused Fenwick intensely. Of course he was, so to speak, quite at home—understood the position thoroughly. But he wasn't going to torment the doctor. He was only making it impossible for him to avoid confession, for his own sake. He did not wait for the stammering to take form, but continued:

“I mean the young lady you told Sally about—the young lady you are hesitating to propose to because there'll be what you call complications in medicine—complications about your mamma, to put it plainly. . . . Oh yes, of course, Sally told me all about it directly.” Vereker cannot resist a laugh, for all his embarrassment, a laugh which somehow had the image of Sally in it. “She *would*, you know. Sally's the sort of party that—that, if she'd been Greek, would have been the daughter of an Arcadian shepherdess and a thunderbolt.”

“Of course she would. I say, Fenwick, look here. . . .”

“Have another cigar, old man.”

"No, I've smoked enough. That one's lasted all the time since we came out. Look here—what I want to say is . . . well, that I was a great fool—did wrong in fact—to talk to Sally about that young lady. . . ."

"And to that young lady about Sally," Fenwick says quietly. For half a second—such alacrity has thought—Vereker takes his meaning wrong; thinks he really believes in the other young lady. Then it flashes on him, and he knows how his companion has been seeing through him all the while. But so lovable is Fenwick, and so much influence is there in the repose of his strength, that there is no resentment on Vereker's part that he should be thus seen through. He surrenders at discretion.

"I see you know," he says helplessly.

"Know you love Sally?—of course I do! So does her mother. So does yours, for that matter. So does every one, except herself. Why, even you yourself know it! *She* never will know it unless she hears it on the best authority—your own, you know."

"Ought I to tell her? I know I was all wrong about that humbug-girl I cooked up to tell her about. I altogether lost my head, and was a fool."

"I can't see what end you proposed to yourself by doing it," says Fenwick a little maliciously. "If Sally had recommended you to speak up, because it was just possible the young lady might be pining for you all the time, you couldn't have asked her *her* name, and then said, 'That's hers—you're her!' like the fat boy in 'Pickwick.' No!—I consider, my dear boy, that you didn't do yourself any good by that ingenious fiction. You know all the while you wouldn't have been sorry to think she understood you."

"I don't know that I didn't think she did. I really don't know what I did or didn't think. I quite lost my head over it, that's the truth."

"Highly proper. Quite consistent with human experience! It's the sort of job chaps always do lose their heads over. The question now is, What are we going to do next?" Which meant what was Vereker going to do next? and was understood by his hearer in that sense. He made no answer at the moment, and Fenwick was not going to press for one.

A Newcastle collier had come in to deliver her cargo some days

since, before the wind sprang up, and the coal-carts had been passing and repassing across the sands at low water; for there was a new moon somewhere in the sky when she came, as thin as a sickle, clinging tight round the business moon that saw to the spring-tides, a phantom sphere an intrepid star was daring to go close to. This brig had not been disappointing her backers, for wagers had been freely laid that she would drag her moorings in the wind, and drift. Fenwick and Vereker stopped in their walk to lean on the wooden rail above the beach that skirted the two inclines, going either way, up which the waggons had been a couple of hours ago scrambling over the shingle against time, to land one more load yet while the ebb allowed it. They could hear the yeo-yeo! of the sail-hoisters at work on the big main-sail abaft, and wondered how on earth she was going to be got clear with so little sea-way and the wind dead in shore. But they were reassured by the ancient mariner with the striped shirt, whose mission in life seemed to be to stand about and enlighten land-minds about sea-facts. The master of yander craft had doon that much afover, and he'd do it again. Why, he'd known him from three year old, the striped shirt had! Which settled the matter. Then presently the clink-clink of the windlass dragging at the anchor. They watched her in silence till, free of her moorings, any one could have sworn she would be on shore to a certainty. But she wasn't. She seemed mysteriously to be able to manage for herself, and just as a berth for the night on the shingle appeared inevitable, leaned over to the wind and crept away from the land, triumphant.

Then, the show being over, as Fenwick and Vereker turned to look the lateness of the hour in the face, and get home to bed, the latter answered the question of the former, as though he had but just asked it.

"Speak to Sally. I shall have to." And then added, with an awestruck face and bated breath: "But it's *awful!* A moment after he was laughing at himself, as he said to his companion, referring to a very palpable fact, "I don't wonder I made you laugh just now."

They walked on without much said till they came to Iggulden's; when the doctor, seeing no light in the sitting-room, hoped his worthy mother had fulfilled a promise made when they came