

## CHAPTER XLV

OF CONRAD VEREKER'S REVISION OF PARADISE, AND OF FENWICK'S HIGH FEVER. OF AN ENGLISH OFFICER WHO WAVERED AT BOMBAY, AND OF FENWICK'S SURPRISE-BATH IN THE BRITISH CHANNEL. WHY HE DID NOT SINK. THE ELLEN JANE OF ST. SENNANS. ONLY SALLY IS IN THE WATER STILL. MORE BOATS. FOUND!

FENWICK, haunted by the phantoms of his own past—always, as his fever grew, assuming more and more the force of realities—but convinced of their ephemeral nature, and that the crisis of this fever would pass and leave him free, had walked quickly along the sea front towards the cliff pathway. Had Dr. Conrad seen him as he passed below his window and looked up at it, he would probably have suspected something and followed him. And then the events of this story would have travelled a different road. But Vereker, possessed by quite another sort of delirium, had risen even earlier—almost with the dawn—and, taking Sally's inaccessibility at that unearthly hour for granted, had gone for a long walk over what was now to him a land of enchantment—the same ground he and Sally had passed over on the previous evening. He and his mother would be on their way to London in a few hours, and he would like to see the landmarks that were to be a precious memory for all time yet once more while he had the chance. Who could say that he would ever visit St. Sennans again?

If Fenwick, in choosing this direction first, had a half-formed idea of attracting the doctor's attention, the appearance of Mrs. Iggulden's shuttered parlour-window would have discouraged him. It told a tale of a household still asleep, and quite truly as far as she herself was concerned. For Dr. Conrad, as might have been expected, was very late in coming home the night before; and his mother's peculiarity of not being able to sleep if kept up till eleven, combined with the need of a statement of her position, a declaration of policy, and almost a budget,

if not quite, on the subject of her son's future housekeeping, having resulted in what threatened to become an all-night sitting, the good woman's dozes and repentances, with jerks, on the stairs overnight, had produced their consequences in the morning. Fenwick passed the house, and walked on as far as where the path rose to the cliffs; then turned back, and, pausing a moment, as we have seen, under Sally's window, failed in his dreamy state to see her as she looked over the cross-bar at him, and then went on towards the old town. It may be she was not very visible; the double glasses of an open sash-window are almost equal to opacity. But even with that, the extreme aberration of Fenwick's mind at the moment is the only way to account for his not seeing her.

In fact, his mental perturbation came and went by gusts, as his memory caught at or relinquished agitating points of reminiscence, always dwelling on that parting from Rosalind at Umballa. His brain and nervous system were in a state that involved a climax and reaction; and, unhappily, this climax, during which his identification of his present self with his memory of its past was intensified to the point of absolute hallucination, came at an inopportune moment. If he could only have kept the phantoms of his imagination at bay until he met Sally! But, really, speculation on so strange a frame of mind is useless; we can only accept the facts as they stand.

He had no recollection afterwards of what followed when he passed the house and failed to see Sally or hear her call out to him. For the time being he was back again in his life of twenty years ago. Those who find this hard to believe may see no way of accounting for what came about but by ascribing to Fenwick an intention of suicide. For our part we believe him to have been absolutely incapable of such an act from a selfish impulse; and, moreover, it is absurd to impute to him such a motive, at this time, however strongly he might have been impelled towards it by discovering the injustice and cruelty of his own unforgiveness towards his young wife at some previous time—as, for instance, in America—when she herself was beyond his reach, and a recantation of his error impossible. Unless we accept his conduct as the result of a momentary dementia, produced by overstrain, it must remain inexplicable.



It appeared to him, so far as he was afterwards able to define or record it, that he was no longer walking on the familiar track between the few lodging-houses that made up the old St. Sennans, and the still older fishing-quarter near the jetty, but that he was again on his way from Lahore to Kurachi, from which he was to embark for a new land where his broken heart might do its best to heal; for if ever a man was utterly broken-hearted it was he when he came away from Lahore, after his futile attempt to procure a divorce. He no longer saw the cold northern sea under its great blue cloud-curtain that had shrouded the coming day; nor the line of fishing-smacks, beached high and dry, and their owners' dwellings near at hand, a little town of tar and timber in behind the stowage-huts of nets and tackle, nor the white escarpment of the cliffs beyond, that the sea had worked so many centuries to plunder from the rounded pastures of the sheep above. He no longer heard the music of the waves on the shingle, nor the cry of the sea-bird that swept over them, nor the tinkle of the sheep-bell the wind knows how to carry so far in the stillness of the morning, nor the voices of the fisher-children playing in the boats that one day may bear them to their death. His mind was far away in the Indian heat, parching and suffocated on the long railway journey from Lahore to Kurachi, scarcely better when he had reached his first boat that was to take him to Bombay, to embark again a day or two later for Australia. How little he had forgotten of the short but tedious delay in that chaotic emporium of all things European and Asiatic, that many-coloured meeting-ground of a thousand nationalities! How little, that the whole should come back to him now, and fill his brain with its reality, till the living present grew dim and vanished; reviving now and again, as fiction, read in early years, revives with a suggested doubt—is it true or false?

He sat again on the Esplanade at Bombay, as the sun vanished in a flood of rosy gold, and released the world from his heat. He felt again the relief of the evening wind; heard again the chat of a group of English officers who sipped sherry-cobblers at a table a few paces off. "I always change my mind," said one of them, "backwards and forwards till the last minute; then I make it the last one." He quite understood this man's speech,

and thought how like himself! For from the time he left Lahore he, too, had gone backwards and forwards, now resolving to return, come what might, now telling himself firmly there was no remedy but in distance apart, and all there might be of oblivion. Was there not yet time? He could still go back, even now. But no; the old obduracy was on him. Rosey had deceived him!

Then he seemed to have come again to *his* last minute. Once he was fairly on the ship that was even now coaling for her voyage, once the screw was on the move and the shore-lights vanishing, the die would be cast. The stars that he and Rosey had seen in that cool English garden that night he met her first would vanish, too, and a world would be between them. Still, the hour had not come; it was not too late yet. But still the inveterate thought came back—she *had* deceived him.

So his delirium ended as its prototype of over twenty years ago had ended. He hardened his heart, thrust aside all thought of forgiveness and repentance, and went resolutely down to the quay, as he thought, to embark on the little boat for the ship, and so practically put all thought of hesitation and return out of his mind. This moment was probably what would have been the crisis of his fever, and it was an evil hour for him in which the builder of the pier at St. Sennans made it so like the platform of that experience of long ago. But the boat that he saw before him as he stepped unhesitatingly over its edge was only the image of a distempered brain, and in an instant he was struggling with the cold, dark water. A sudden shock of chill, an intolerable choking agony of breath involuntarily held, an instantaneous dissipation of his dream, the natural result of the shock, and Fenwick knew himself for what he was, and fought the cruel water in his despair. Even so a drowning man fights who in old failures to learn swimming has just mastered its barest rudiments. A vivid pageant rushed across his mind of all the consequences of what seemed to him now his inevitable death, clearest of all a sad vision of Sally and Rosalind returning to their home alone—the black dresses and the silence. He found voice for one long cry for help, without a hope that it could be heard or that help could be at hand.

But he was neither unseen nor unheard, as you will know if



we have not failed in showing the succession of events. Sally never hesitated an instant as she caught sight of the delirious man's involuntary plunge into the green waves that had no terrors for *her*. She threw off as she ran, fast, fast down the wooden stairway, the only clothes she could get rid of—her hat and light summer cloak—and went straight, with a well-calculated dive, to follow him and catch him as he rose. If only she did not miss him! Let her once pinion his arms from behind, and she would get him ashore even if no help came. Why, there was no sea to speak of!

The man Jacob Tracy, the father of Benjamin, saw something to quicken his speed as he walked along the pier to help in the discovery of the life-belt. Why did the swimming young lady from Lobjoit's want to be rid of her wrap-up at that rate as she turned so sharp round to run down the ladder? He increased a brisk walk to a run as the lad, who had followed the young lady down the steps, came running up again; for there was hysterical terror in his voice—he was a mere boy—as he shouted something that became, as distance lessened, "In t' wa-ater! in t' wa-ater! in t' wa-ater! in t' wa-ater!" And he was waving something in his hand—a lady's hat surely; for with an instinct of swift presence of mind—a quality that is the breath of life to all that go down to the sea in ships, mariners or fisher-folk—he had seen that the headgear Sally threw away would tell its tale quicker than any words he could rely on finding.

"Roon smart, yoong Benjamin—roon for the bo'ats and call out 'oars'! Roon, boy—you've no time to lose!" And as the father dashes down the steps he spoke of as "the ladder" the son runs for all he is worth to carry the alarm to the shore. He shouts, "Oars, oars, oars!" as he was told. But it is not needed, for his thought of bringing up the hat has done his work already for him. The coastguard, though the pier itself hid the two immersions from him, is quick of apprehension and ready with his glass, and has seen the boy's return from below; and at the same time heard, not his words, but the terror in them, and by some mysterious agency has sent a flying word along the beach that has brought a population out to help.

A bad time of the tide to get a boat off sharp, and a long

shelving run of sandy shingle before we reach the sea; for all the boats are on the upper strand of the beach, above the last high-water mark, and the flow of the tide is scarcely an hour old. There is a short squat cobble, flat-bottomed and of intolerable weight, down near the waters, and its owner makes for it. Another man drives him out seawards, against the constant lift of breaking waves, large enough to be troublesome, small enough to be numerous. They give no chance to the second man to leap into the boat, so deep has he to go, pushing on until the pads are out and the boat controlled; but he has barely time to feel the underdraw of the recoiling wave when the straight scour of a keel comes down along the sand and pebbles—the Ellen Jane, St. Sennans—half-pushed, half-borne by a crew three minutes have extemporised. You two in the bows, and you two astern, and the spontaneous natural leader—the man the emergency makes—at the tiller-ropes, and Ellen Jane is off, well drenched at the outset. An oar swings round high in the air, not to knock one of you two astern into the water, and then, "Give way!" and then the short, quick rhythm of the stroke, and four men at their utmost stress, each knowing life and death may hang upon the greatness of his effort.

The cobble is soon outshot, but its owner will not give in. He bears away from the course of the boat that has passed him, to seek their common object where the tide-drift may have swept it, beyond some light craft at their moorings which would have hidden it for a while. He has the right of it this time, for as he passes, straining at his sculls, under the stern of a pleasure-yacht at anchor, his eye is caught by a black spot rising on a wave, and he makes for it. Not too fast at the last, though, but cautiously, so as to grasp the man with the life-belt and hold him firm till help shall come to get him on board. He might easily have overshot him; but he has him now, and the four-oar sights him as she swings round between the last-moored boat and the pier; and comes apace, the quicker for the tide.

"What is it ye say, master? What do ye make it out the gentleman says, Peter?" For Fenwick, hauled on board the cobble with the help of a man from the other boat, who returns to his oar, is alive and conscious, but not much more. A brandy-flask comes from somewhere in the steerage, where a mop and a



tin pot and a boathook live, and its effect is good. The half-drowned man becomes articulate enough to justify the report. "It's his daughter he's asking for—overboard, too!" and then the man who spoke first says: "You be easy in your mind, master; we'll find her. Bear away a bit, and lie to, Tom." Tom is the man in the cobble, and he does as he is bidden. He ships his sculls and drifts, watching round on all sides for what may be just afloat near the surface. The four-oar remains, and the eyes of her crew are straining hard to catch a sight of anything that is not mere lift and ripple of a wave.

Then more boats one after another, and more, and the gathering crowd that lines the shore sees them scatter and lie to, some way apart, to watch the greater space of water. All drift, because they know that what they seek is drifting, too, and that if they move they lose their only chance; for the thing they have to find is so small, so small, and that great waste of pitiless sea is so large. It is their only chance.

The crowd, always growing, moves along the beach as the flotilla of drifting boats move slowly with the tide. They can hear the shouting from boat to boat, but catch but little of the words. They follow on, with little speech among themselves, and hope dying slowly out of their hearts. Gradually towards the jetty, where the girl they are seeking sat, only a few days since, beside the man whose heart the memory of yesterday is still rejoicing; the only trouble of whose unconscious soul is the thought that he and she must soon be parted, however short the term of their separation may be. He will know more soon.

Suddenly the shouting increases in the boats, and excited voices break the silence on the shore. It won't do to hope too much, but surely all the boats are thickening to one spot. . . . No, it's nothing! . . . Yes, it *is*—it *is* something—one knows what—sighted abaft the Ellen Jane, whose steersman catches it with a boathook as the oars we on the beach saw suddenly drop back water—slowly, cautiously—and only wait for him to drag the light weight athwart the gunwale to row for the dear life towards the town. The scattered crowd turns and comes back, trampling the shingle, to meet the boat as she lands, and follow what she brings to the nearest haven.

## CHAPTER XLVI

AN ERRAND IN VAIN, AND HOW DR. CONRAD CAME TO KNOW. CONCERNING LLOYD'S COFFEEHOUSE, AND THE BATTLE OF CAMPERDOWN. MARSHALL HALL'S SYSTEM AND SILVESTER'S. SOCIAL DISADVANTAGES. A CHAT WITH A CENTENARIAN, AND HOW ROSALIND CAME TO KNOW. THOMAS LOCOCK OF ROCHESTER. ONE O'CLOCK!

"Is that you, Dr. Conrad?" It was Rosalind who spoke, through the half-open window of her bedroom, to the happy, expectant face of the doctor in the little front garden below. "I'm only just up, and they're both gone out. I shall be down in a few minutes." For she had looked into her husband's room, and then into Sally's, and concluded they must have gone out together. So much the better! If Sally was with him, no harm could come to him.

"I don't see them anywhere about," said the doctor. Sally had not been gone ten minutes, and at this moment had just caught sight of Fenwick making for the pier. The short cut down took her out of sight of the house. Rosalind considered a minute.

"Very likely they've gone to the hotel—the 'beastly hotel,' you know." There is the sound of a laugh, and the caress in her voice, as she thinks of Sally, whom she is quoting. "Gerry found a friend there last night—a German gentleman—who was to go at seven-fifty. Very likely he's walked up to say good-bye to him. Suppose you go to meet them! How's Mrs. Verker this morning?"

"Do you know, I haven't seen her yet! We talked rather late, so I left without waking her. I've been for a walk."

"Well, go and meet Gerry. I feel pretty sure he's gone there." And thereon Dr. Conrad departed, and so, departing towards the new town, lost sight for the time being of the pier and the coast. He went by the steps and Albion Villas, and as he caught a glimpse therefrom of the pier-end in the distance, had an im-