

## CHAPTER XLVII

WAS IT THE LITTLE GALVANIC BATTERY? THE LAST CHAPTER RETOLD BY THE PRESS. A PROPER RAILING. BUT THEY *WEREN'T* DROWNED. WHAT'S THE FUSS? MASTER CHANCELLORSHIP APPEARS AND VANISHES. ELECTUARY OF ST. SENNA. AT GEORGIANA TERRACE. A LETTER FROM SALLY. ANOTHER FROM CONRAD. EVERYTHING VANISHES!

PROFESSOR SALES WILSON, Mrs. Julius Bradshaw's papa, was enjoying himself thoroughly. He was the sole occupant of 260, Ladbroke Grove Road, servants apart. All his blood-connected household had departed two days after the musical evening described in Chapter XL., and there was nothing that pleased him better than to have London to himself—that is to say, to himself and five millions of perfect strangers. He had it now, and could wallow unmolested in Sabellian researches, and tear the flimsy theories of Bopsius—whose name we haven't got quite right—to tatters. Indeed, we are not really sure the researches *were* Sabellian. But no matter!

Just at the moment at which we find him, the Professor was not engaged in any researches at all, unless running one's eye down the columns of a leading journal, to make sure there is nothing in them, is a research. That is what he was doing in his library. And he was also talking to himself—a person from whom he had no reserves or concealments. What he had to say ran in this wise:

"H'm!—h'm!—'The Cyclopean Cyclopædia.' Forty volumes in calf. Net price thirty-five pounds. A digest of human knowledge, past, present, and probable. With a brief appendix enumerating the things of which we are still ignorant, and of our future ignorance of which we are scientifically certain . . . h'm! h'm! . . . not dear at the price. But stop a bit! 'Until twelve o'clock on Saturday next copies of the above, with re-

volving bookcase, can be secured for the low price of seven pounds ten.' . . ." This did not seem to increase the speaker's confidence and he continued, as he wrestled with a rearrangement of the sheet: "Shiny paper, and every volume weighs a ton. Very full of matter—everything in it except the thing you want to know. By-the-bye . . . what a singular thing it is, when you come to think of it, that so many people will sell you a thing worth a pound for sixpence, who won't give you a shilling outright on any terms! It must have to do with their unwillingness to encourage mendicancy. A noble self-denial, prompted by charity organizations! Hullo!—what's this? 'Heroic rescue from drowning at St. Sennans-on-Sea.' H'm—h'm—h'm!—can't read all that. But *that's* where the married couple went—St. Sennans-on-Sea. The bride announced her intention yesterday of looking in at five to-day for tea. So I suppose I shall be disturbed shortly."

The soliloquist thought it necessary to repeat his last words twice to convince himself and the atmosphere that his position was one of grievance. Having done this, and feeling he ought to substantiate his suggestion that he was just on the point of putting salt on the tail of an unidentified Samnite, or a finishing touch on the demolition of Bopsius, he folded his newspaper, which we suspect he had not been reading candidly from, and resumed his writing.

Did you ever have a quarter of an hour of absolutely unalloyed happiness? Probably not, if you have never known the joys of profound antiquarian erudition, with an unelucidated past behind you, and inexpensive publication before. The Professor's fifteen minutes that followed were not only without alloy, but had this additional zest—that that girl would come bothering in directly, and he would get his grievance, and work it. And at no serious expense, for he was really very partial to his daughter, and meant, *au fond de soi*, to enjoy her visit. Nevertheless, discipline had to be maintained, if only for purposes of self-deception, and the Professor really believed in his own "Humph! I supposed it would be that," when Lætitia's knock came at the street door.

"Such a shame to disturb you, papa dear! But you'll have to give me tea—you said you would."

"It isn't five o'clock yet. Well—never mind. Sit down and don't fidget. I shall have done presently. . . . No! make yourself useful now you *are* here. Get me 'Passeri Picturæ Etruscorum,' volume three, out of shelf C near the window . . . that's right. Very good find for a young married woman. Now sit down and read the paper—there's something will interest you. You may ring for tea, only don't talk."

The Professor then became demonstratively absorbed in the Sabellians, or Bopsius, or both, and Lætitia acted as instructed, but without coming on the newspaper-paragraph. She couldn't ask for a clue after so broad a hint, so she had to be contented with supposing her father referred to the return of Sir Charles Penderfield, Bart., as a Home Rule Unionist and Protectionist Free Trader. Only if it was that, it was the first she had ever known of her father being aware of the Bart.'s admiration for herself. So she made the tea, and waited till the pen-scratching stopped, and the Sabellians or Bopsius were blotted, glanced through, and ratified.

"There, that'll do for that, I suppose." His tone surrendered the grievance as an act of liberality, but maintained the principle. "Well, have we found it?"

"Found what?"

"The heroic rescue—at your place—Saint Somebody—Saint Senanus. . . ."

"No! Do show me that." Lætitia forms a mental image of a lifeboat going out to a wreck. How excited Sally must have been!

"Here, give it me and I'll find it. . . . Yes—that's right—a big lump and a little lump. I'm to take less sugar because of gout. Very good! Oh . . . yes . . . here we are. 'Heroic Rescue at St. Sennan's' . . . just under 'Startling Elopement at Clapham Rise' . . . Got it?"

Lætitia supplied the cup of tea, poured one for herself, and took the paper from her father without the slightest suspicion of what was coming. "It will have to wait a minute till I've had some tea," she said. "I'm as thirsty as I can be. I've been to see my mother-in-law and Constance"—this was Julius's sister—"off to Southend. And just fancy, papa; Pag and I played from nine till a quarter-to-one last night, and he never

felt it, nor had any headache nor anything." The topic is so interesting that the unread paragraph has to wait.

The Professor cannot think of any form of perversion better than "Very discreditable to him. I hope you blew him well up?"

"Now, papa, don't be nonsensical! Do you know, I'm really beginning to believe Pag's right, and it *was* the little galvanic battery. Shouldn't you say so, though, seriously?"

"Why, yes. If there wasn't a big galvanic battery, it must have been the little one. It stands to reason. But *what* does my musical son-in-law think was the little galvanic battery?"

"Oh dear, papa, how ridiculous you are! Why, of course, his nerves going away—as they really *have* done, you know; and I can't see any good pretending they haven't. Yesterday was the fourth evening he hasn't felt them. . . ."

"Stop a bit! There is a lack of scientific precision in the structure of your sentences. A young married woman ought really to be more accurate. Now let's look it over, and do a little considering. I gather, in the first place, that my son-in-law's nerves going away was, or were, a little galvanic battery. . . ."

"Dear papa, don't paradox and catch me out. Just this once, be reasonable! Think what a glorious thing it would be for us if his nerves *had* gone for good. Another cup? Was the last one right?"

"My position is peculiar. (Yes, the tea was all right.) I find myself requested to be reasonable, and to embark on a career of reasonableness by considering the substantial advantages to my daughter and her husband of the disappearance of his nervous system. . . ."

"Oh, I wish you wouldn't! *Do* be serious. . . ." The Professor looked at her reflectively as he drank the cup of tea, and it seemed to dawn on him slowly that his daughter *was* serious. The fact is, Tishy was very serious indeed, and was longing for sympathy over a matter for great elation. She and Julius had been purposely playing continuously for long hours to test the apparent suspension or cessation of his nervous affection, and had not so far seen a sign of a return; but they were dreadfully afraid of counting their chickens in advance.

"I noticed the other evening"—the Professor has surrendered, and become serious—"that Julius wasn't any the worse, and he had played a long time. What should you do?" Tishy looked inquiringly. "Well, I mean what steps could be taken if it were . . . ?"

"If we could trust to it? Oh, no difficulty at all! Any number of engagements directly."

"It would please your mother." Tishy cannot help a passing thought on the oddity of her parents' relations to one another. Even though he spoke of the Dragon as a connexion of his daughter he was but little concerned with, the first thought that crossed his mind was a sort of satisfaction under protest that she would have something to be pleased about. Tishy wondered whether she and Julius would end up like that. Of course they wouldn't! What pity people's parents were so unreasonable!

"Yes; mamma wouldn't be at all sorry. Fiddlers are not Baronets, but anything is better than haberdashing. *I'm* not ashamed of it, you know." She had subjected herself gratuitously to her own suspicion that she might be, and resented it.

Her father looked at her with an amused face; looked down at these social fads of poor humanity from the height of his Olympus. If he knew anything about the Unionist Home Ruler's aspirations for Lætitia, he said nothing. Then he asked a natural question—what *was* the little galvanic battery? Tishy gave her account of it, but before she had done the Professor was thinking about Sabines or Lucanians. The fact is that Tishy was never at her best with her father. She was always so anxious to please him that she tumbled over her own anxiety, and in this present case didn't tell her story as well as she might have done. He began considering how he could get back to the shreds of Bopsius, if any were left, and looked at his watch.

"Well, that was very funny—very funny!" said he absently. "Now, don't forget the heroic rescue before you go."

Tishy perceived the delicate hint, and picked up the paper with "I declare I was forgetting all about it!" But she had scarcely cast her eyes on it when she gave a cry. "Oh, papa, papa; it's *Sally!* Oh dear!" And then: "Oh dear, oh dear! I can hardly see to make it out. But I'm sure she's all right! They say so." And kept on trying to read. Her father did

what was, under the circumstances, the best thing to do—took the paper from her, and as she sank back with a beating heart and flushed face on the chair she had just risen from read the paragraph to her as follows:

"HEROIC RESCUE FROM DROWNING AT ST. SENNANS-ON-SEA. —Early this morning, as Mr. Algernon Fenwick, of Shepherd's Bush, at present on a visit at the old town, was walking on the pier-end, at the point where there is no rail or rope for the security of the public, his foot slipped, and he was precipitated into the sea, a height of at least ten feet. Not being a swimmer, his life was for some minutes in the greatest danger; but fortunately for him his stepdaughter, Miss Rosalind Nightingale, whose daring and brilliant feats in swimming have been for some weeks past the admiration and envy of all the visitors to the bathing quarter of this most attractive of south-coast watering-places, was close at hand, and without a moment's hesitation plunged in to his rescue. Encumbered as she was by clothing, she was nevertheless able to keep Mr. Fenwick above water, and ultimately to reach a life-buoy that was thrown from the pier. Unfortunately, having established Mr. Fenwick in a position of safety, she thought her best course would be to return to the pier. She was unable in the end to reach it, and her strength giving way, she was picked up, after an immersion of more than twenty minutes, by the boats that put off from the shore. It will readily be imagined that a scene of great excitement ensued, and that a period of most painful anxiety followed, for it was not till nearly four hours afterwards that, thanks to the skill and assiduity of Dr. Fergus Maccoll, of 22A, Albion Crescent, assisted by Dr. Vereker, of London, the young lady showed signs of life. We are happy to say that the latest bulletins appear to point to a speedy and complete recovery, with no worse consequences than a bad fright. We understand that the expediency of placing a proper railing at all dangerous points on the pier is being made the subject of a numerous signed petition to the Town Council."

"That seems all right," said the Professor. And he said nothing further, but remained rubbing his shaved surface in a sort of compromising way—a way that invited or permitted exception to be taken to his remark.

"All right? Yes, but—oh, papa, do think what might have happened! They might both have been drowned."

"But they weren't!"

"Of course they weren't! But they *might* have been."

"Well, it would have proved that people are best away from the seaside. Not that any further proof is necessary. Now, good-bye, my dear; I must get back to my work."

That afternoon Julius Bradshaw went on a business mission to Cornhill, and was detained in the city till past five o'clock. It was then too late to return to the office, as six was the closing hour; so he decided on the Twopenny Tube to Lancaster Gate, the nearest point to home. There was a great shouting of evening papers round the opening into the bowels of the earth at the corner of the Bank, and Julius's attention was caught by an unearthly boy with a strange accent.

"'Mail and Echo,' third edition, all the latest news for a 'apeny. Fullest partic'lars in my copies. Alderman froze to death on the Halps. Shocking neglect of twins. 'Oxton man biles his third wife alive. Cricket this day—Surrey going strong. More about heroic rescue from drowning at St. Senna's. Full and ack'rate partic'lars in my copies only. Catch hold! . . ." Julius caught hold, and thought the boy amusing. Conversation followed, during cash settlements.

"Who's been heroically rescued?"

"Friend of mine—young lady—fished her governor out—got drowned over it herself, and was brought to. 'Mail' a 'apeny; torkin' a penny extra! Another 'apeny." Julius acquiesced, but felt entitled to more talking.

"Where was it?"

"St. Senna's, where they make the lectury—black stuff. . . . Yes, it *was* a friend o' mine, mister, so I tell you, and no lies! Miss Rosalind Nightingale. I see her in the fog round Piccadilly way. . . . No, no lies at all! Told me her name of her own accord, and went indoors." Julius would have tried to get to the bottom of this if he had not been so taken aback by it, even at the cost of more pence for conversation; but by the time he had found that his informant had certainly read the paragraph, or at least mastered Sally's name right, the boy had

vanished. Of course, he was the boy with the gap in his teeth that she had seen in the fog when Colonel Lund was dying. We can only hope that his shrewdness and prudence in worldly matters have since brought him the success they deserve, as his disappearance was final.

Even the Twopenny Tube was too slow for Julius Bradshaw, so mad was he with impatience to get to Georgiana Terrace. When he got there, and went upstairs two steps at a time, and "I say, Tishy dearest, look at *this!*" on his lips, he was met half-way by his young wife, also extending a newspaper, and "Paggy, just *fancy* what's happened! Look at *this!*"

They were so wild with excitement that they refused food—at least, when it took the form of second helpings—and when the banquet was over Lætitia could do nothing but walk continually about the room with gleaming eyes and a flushed face waiting furiously for the post; for she was sure it would bring her a letter from Sally or her mother. And she was right, for the rush to the street door that followed the postman's knock resulted firstly in denunciations of an intransitive letter-box nobody but a fool would ever have tried to stuff all those into, and secondly in a pounce by Lætitia on Sally's own handwriting.

"You may just as well read it upstairs comfortably, Tish," says Julius, meanly affecting stoicism now that it is perfectly clear—for the arrival of the letter practically shows it—that nobody is incapacitated by the accident. "Come along up!"

"All right!" says his wife. "Why, mine's written in pencil! Who's yours from?"

"I haven't opened it yet. Come along. Don't be a goose!" This was a little cheap stoicism, worth deferring satisfaction of curiosity three minutes for.

"Whose handwriting is it?" She goes on devouring, intensely absorbed, though she speaks.

"It looks like the doctor's."

"Of course! You'll see directly. . . . All right, I'm coming!"

Take your last look at the Julius Bradshaws, as they settle down with animated faces to serious perusal of their letters. They may just as well drink their coffee, though, and Julius will presently light his cigar for anything we know to the contrary; but we shall not see it, for when we have transcribed the two

letters they are reading we shall lay down our pen, and then, if you want to know any more about the people in this story, you must inquire of the originals, all of whom are still living except Dr. Vereker's mother, who died last year, we believe. Here are the letters:

"MY DEAREST TISHY,

"I have a piece of news to tell that will be a great surprise to you. I am engaged to Conrad Vereker. Perhaps, though, I oughtn't to say as much as that, because it hasn't gone any farther at present than me promising not to marry any one else, and as far as I can see I might have promised any man that.

"Now, don't write and say you expected it all along, because I shan't believe you.

"Of course, tell anybody you like—only I hope they'll all say that's no concern of theirs. I should be so much obliged to them. Besides, so very little has transpired to go by that I can't see exactly what they could either congratulate or twit about. Being engaged is so very shadowy. Do you remember our dancing-mistress at school, who had been engaged seven years to a dancing-master, and then they broke it off by mutual consent, and she married a Creole? And they'd saved up enough for a school of their own all the time! However, as long as it's distinctly understood there's to be no marrying at present, I don't think the arrangement a bad one. Of course, you'll understand I mean other girls, and the sort of men they get engaged to. With Prosy it's different; one knows where one is. Only I shouldn't consider it honourable to jilt Prosy, even for the sake of remaining single. You see what I mean.

"The reason of pencil (don't be alarmed!) is that I am writing this in bed, having been too long in the water. It's to please Prosy, because my System has had a shake. I *am* feeling very queer still, and can't control my thumb to write. I must tell you about it, or you'll get the story somewhere else and be frightened.

"It was all Jeremiah's fault, and I really can't think what he was doing. He admits that he was seedy, and had had a bad night. Anyhow, it was like this: I followed him down to the pier very early before breakfast, and you remember where the

man was fishing and caught nothing that day? Well, what does Jeremiah do but just walk plump over the edge. I had all but got to him, by good luck, and of course I went straight for him and caught him before he sank. I induced him not to kick and flounder, and got him inside a life-belt they threw from the pier, and then I settled to leave him alone and swim to the steps, because you've no idea how I felt my clothes, and it would have been all right, only a horrible heavy petticoat got loose and demoralised me. I don't know how it happened, but I got all wrong somehow, and a breaker caught me. *Don't get drowned, Tishy; or, if you do, don't be revived again!* I don't know which is worst, but I think reviving. I can't write about it. I'll tell you when I come back.

"They won't tell me how long I was coming to, but it must have been much longer than I thought, when one comes to think of it. Only I can't tell, because when poor dear Prosy had got me to \*—down at Lloyd's Coffeehouse, where old Simon sits all day—and I had been wrapped up in what I heard a Scotchman call 'weel-warmed blawnkets,' and brought home in a closed fly from Padlock's livery stables, I went off sound asleep with my fingers and toes tingling, and never knew the time nor anything. (Continuation bit.) This is being written, to tell you the truth, in the small hours of the morning, in secrecy with a guttering candle. It seems to have been really quite a terrible alarm to poor darling mother and Jeremiah, and much about the same to my medical adviser, who resuscitated me on Marshall Hall's system, followed by Silvester's, and finally opened a vein. And there was I alive all the time, and not grateful to Prosy at all, I can tell you, for bringing me to. I have requested not to be brought to next time. The oddity of it all was indescribable. And there, now I come to think of it, I've never so much as seen the Octopus since Prosy and I got engaged. I shall have to go round as soon as I'm up. (Later continuation bit—after breakfast.) Do you know, it makes me quite miserable to think what an anxiety I've been to all of them! Mother and J. can't take their eyes off me, and look quite wasted and resigned. And poor dear Prosy! How ever shall I make it up to him? Do you

\* Part of a verb to *get to*, or *bring to*. Not very intelligible!

know, as soon as it was known I was to,\* the dear fellow actually tumbled down insensible! I had no idea of the turn-out there's been until just now, when mother and Jeremiah confessed up. Just fancy it! Now I must shut up to catch the post.

"Your ever affect. friend,

"SALLY."

"MY DEAR BRADSHAW,

"I am so very much afraid you and your wife may be alarmed by hearing of the events of this morning—possibly by a press-paragraph, for these things get about—that I think it best to send you a line to say that, though we have all had a terrible time of anxiety, no further disastrous consequences need be anticipated. Briefly, the affair may be stated thus:

"Fenwick and Miss Nightingale were on the pier early this morning, and from some unexplained false step F. fell from the lower stage into the water. Miss N. immediately plunged in to his rescue, and brought him in safety to a life-buoy that was thrown from the pier. It seemed that she then started to swim back, being satisfied of his safety till other help came, but got entangled with her clothes and went under. She was brought ashore insensible, and remained so nearly four hours. For a long time I was almost without hope, but we persevered against every discouragement, with complete final success. I am a good deal more afraid now of the effect of the shock on Mrs. Fenwick and her husband than for anything that may happen to Miss N., whose buoyancy of constitution is most remarkable. You will guess that I had rather a rough time (the news came rather suddenly to me), and all the more (but I know you will be glad to hear this) that Miss N. and your humble servant had only just entered on an engagement to be married at some date hereafter not specified. I am ashamed to say I showed weakness (but not till I was sure the lungs were acting naturally), and had to be revived with stimulants! I am all right now, and, do you know, I really believe my mother will be all the better for it; for when she heard what had happened, she actually got up and *ran*—yes, *ran*—to Lloyd's Coffeehouse (you remember it?), where I was just coming round, and had the satisfaction of telling her the news. I cannot help suspecting that her case may have been wrongly diagnosed,

\* See note, p. 563.

and that the splanchnic ganglion and solar plexus are really the seat of the evil. If so, the treatment has been entirely at fault.

"I shall most likely be back to-morrow, so keep your congrats. for me, old chap. No time for a letter. Love from us all to yourself and Mrs. J. B.

"Yours ever,

"CONRAD VEREKER.

"P.S.—I reopen this (which I wrote late last night) to say that Miss N., so far from having acquired a horror of the water (as is usual in such cases), talks of 'swimming over the ground' if the weather clears. I fear she is incorrigible."

THE END

