

A MUSICAL CINDERELLA.

BY WILLIAM FREELAND.

PROLOGUE.

AFTER numerous stale protestations, my own little boy, who bears the brilliant name of Silvertongue, and that other boy whom I call Sphinx, had just gone to bed.

Silvertongue, I may as well state, is so called from the exceedingly clear and metallic ring of his voice. You never heard such a voice. It glides into the heart of silence like a dagger of sound, but without causing any pain beyond the introductory jag. Getting used to it, you rather like it—at least I do; and, indeed, to tell you quietly in your ear, although I have been a good deal up and down the world, I never yet heard a voice that could match with that of Silvertongue. You may call this prejudice, or domestic bigotry; but just come you down one of these fine nights and judge for yourself. If the little fellow does not banish all doubt from your heart, why, then, you must be a heretic of flint. To tell you the whole truth, however, I must say that Silvertongue is inclined now and then to be a bit of a chatterbox; and his mother and I used seriously to wonder, about the beginning of the year, whether it would not be a good idea to take him to the (late) Great Exhibition, and show him off as the newest solution of the theory of Perpetual Motion.

Now, imagine a neat little chap, with deep dark eyes—deep beyond the reach of physiognomical plummet; not very big nor very old—about three feet of the one and five years of the other; silent as a diplomatist at a foreign court; and with a head of the Andean stamp and granite quality—peaked, ridged, and balanced with bumps in such a manner as might make the ghost of Spurzheim leap from his shroud;—though Heaven forbend that he should ever do so! Imagine this, and you have an imperfect vision of Sphinx, whose name, however, is not founded on these qualities, but on the atmosphere of mystery which surrounds his personal history. His biography would—but thereby hangs a tale, which I am not yet at liberty to relate. When I do, however, let certain Egyptians look out for Red Sea squalls!

Well, after almost unconquerable opposition, both these little fellows had gone to bed. Silvertongue was caught by sleep in the middle of a song, so that he lay all night with a half-finished melody on his lips, dreaming about strangled nightingales. Sphinx, as usual, lay like a block of dark Luxor marble, only now and then emitting a moan, as if from the mysterious depth of a pyramid.

I had just finished reading the latest letter from the *Times'* correspondent at Athens, giving a history of the revolution which sent King Otho and his Queen home to their friends in Germany. Much I pondered on this event, and on the general inconstancy of fortune; and I confess that, while entertaining the opinion that Greece was well rid of her Bavarian experiment, I imagined that it must have been a peculiarly hard shock to the poor foolish couple to be compelled to flee from the wrath of their people, and take refuge onboard a British ship in one of their own harbours. From thinking on modern Greece, I was insensibly led backwards, along the chain of history, to the time when the soil of that famous land was the favourite haunt of deities, and men of faultless form and godlike genius. Memory becomes dark or radiant according to the theme of meditation. As I half-reclined upon my chair before the fire, my mind became slowly filled

with a brilliancy of light, and was thrilled with an intensity of feeling, which only the remembrance of gods could produce. The *Times* slipped from my hand, and I was fast sinking into that trance of semi-conscious ecstasy in which the soul becomes inspired with the faculty of divine vision and boundless power—capable of seeing into the heart of things which common mortals regard as mysteries, and of performing actions utterly beyond the province of humanity. I walked on the upper slopes of Olympus, surrounded with incomparable shapes, whose utterance seemed enlarged and glorified to an almost inconceivable degree. The language was so ineffably divine as to be beyond human endurance; and it was therefore a partial relief when I felt laid within my own a small soft hand, which I fancied could only be the hand of one of the human descendants of those bright Inteligences of the Mount. There was something in its touch so familiarly human, and yet so much more than human, that I turned quickly to see the owner of it, with the involuntary exclamation, 'O Jupiter!'—which was answered by a feminine voice, which said—

'O father! you have been gazing at that picture again! It is too beautiful. I shall have Walter the artist to take it back, if you don't answer me next time.'

Wasn't this a pretty piece of business. Here was no daughter of Jove after all, though a dearer reality. This was my own Athene, whom I thus playfully distinguish, from the singular resemblance she bears to a portrait of the mythological lady of the same name, with which my brave artist has made perpetual heaven in the picture that so wrests me from my commonplace self in certain visionary moods.

'Beautiful, indeed, Athene! But not too beautiful, since there is something still more beautiful. Should you ever again think that I lose myself rather deeply in that scrap of canvas, just plant your own head between my eyes and it, and the glamour will vanish in half the twinkling of your own blue eye.'

'Oh! that would be magic!'

'Yes, my dear—natural magic. But what's your wish, Athene? I see that there is some unsatisfied desire in your eye. What is it?'

While I gathered up the *Times*, she reminded me of a promise, which I had made two days before, to relate the early history of a certain celebrated singer. So, as little Silvertongue was absent in the land of dreams, pitying the throttled nightingales—as Sphinx was nearly stone dead in the valley of Egyptian Thebes, only occasionally emitting a mysterious Memnonian moan; and as the House-mother had just contrived to fascinate that celebrated baby (of which you may have heard) into a prehistoric slumber—it struck me that I could hardly be better employed for the next hour or so than in settling this little score of storyology, which I had run up in a moment of good nature. Chair in the centre position—slippers (unembroidered) planted at true toasting distance; House-mother on the right, with a critical twinkle in her eyes; Athene on the left, all faith and expectation, and crowned with her Saxon splendour of massy ringlets—I sat before the comfortable fire, and thus began:—

CHAPTER I.

A PRESENT FROM INDIA.

'When was it, Athene, that I told you the story of "Hawk's Nest"?''

'About seven weeks since, I think. Oh, I have it! It

was on the very night when aunt's portrait came from Australia.'

Then you are wrong as to the weeks, for that was three months ago. Your own portrait, I expect, will have reached Golden Creek by this time; and it is not unlikely that your aunt and her friends may this very night be discussing its merits—whether it is the picture of a good-tempered girl, or only of a shrewish little vixen. Couldn't I enlighten them on that subject, eh? But about 'Hawk's Nest.' Do you remember me mentioning the name of Flowerdale?

'Oh, yes; quite well. That was in Mellowshire, on the west coast of England. There was the village of Tenderlynn, with its old steeple—older than the white-headed sexton, who was the oldest inhabitant; and there was the clear Pool Water, flowing round the church, by the cliffs, into the south corner of the bay.'

Well remembered! That is the very spot. In this same beautiful village of Tenderlynn, not a great many years ago, there lived two dashing sisters, named Louisa and Caroline Welltone. Vale Cottage, in which they resided, was their own property; and, having a handsome provision from Government, on account of certain brave services rendered in India by their late father, who had been an officer in a regiment of cavalry, they held a rather respectable position in Tenderlynn society. Their father was killed during a raid against the Sikhs—an event which had so deep an effect upon their mother, that she took fever, and died before she could reach Calcutta, on her melancholy return to England. One black-edged letter brought to the two girls tidings of the death of both parents—that they were now orphans, and alone in the world. Wasn't that a very serious case, Athene?

'Ah! very sad, indeed. Both father and mother dead, and so far from home; and Louisa and Caroline not to see them die! What should I do if mamma and you were dying so far from home? And then Sphinx and little Silvertongue! who would take care of them?'

[At this point, the House-mother broke in with some well-timed counsels which need not be repeated here; but the sum of which was, that to the soul of faith all things are sure, if not clear; and that the bitterest cup of suffering, while it may seem to inflict new agony, is medicinal of some other pain, if not of the very pangs which it produces at the time—leaving a new vigour and purity in the heart after the bloody sweat is over. Old, old homilies, indeed; yet always original when spoken with earnest lips.]

Well, Athene, when the two Welltones received the news of their father and mother's death, they were living in another part of the country. But they soon afterwards came to live at Tenderlynn; and I am sorry to say that neither of them seemed to be so greatly affected by the sudden and woful death of her parents as you might have expected. They were a pair of very handsome ladies, to speak the full truth; and as they were both exceedingly fond of gay dresses, it was not long before their solemn mourning attire began to be superseded by the livelier spring hues of fashion. The manner in which they gradually changed their dress, was, in truth, very like the way of Nature, who, beginning with black winter, slowly advances into the cheery time of buds, and then passes on to the full glory of flowery summer. When Louisa and Caroline Welltone had entirely thrown off their gloomy costume, there was not a more splendid couple in the whole village of Tenderlynn—a fact which they knew perfectly well, and of which they resolved on making the

best use. The result of their fine schemes was to infect the whole of bachelordom—that's all the young men, you know—with a Cupidemic or heart disease. None of the afflicted creatures, I am happy to say, died of the sickening disorder, although many of them bore the stings of it in their central flesh for many years. But it was one of the most curious things that, although these beautiful Tenderlynn belles attracted flocks of admirers, it seemed to be quite beyond their power to get themselves led to the sacred altar of marriage. Everybody admired them, but nobody would marry them. This I could never understand, for they certainly did seem to me to be as likely a pair as any in Flowerdale, or even in wide Mellowshire. Social philosophers—these are the wise men, Athene—explained the difficulty by saying that the Misses Welltone were too extravagant; and that their style of living would have quickly ruined the most prosperous young man in Tenderlynn. The consequence was that the most prosperous young man went half-a-mile farther up the valley, and married Jenny Fenshaw, the blacksmith's daughter, who was a very quiet little maiden indeed, and altogether unstylish; but who, in spite of these serious drawbacks, made one of the very best, most careful, and neatest-handed wives that a sensible man could desire.

I ought to have told you before this, Athene, that the Welltones had an uncle in the Indian Civil Service—that is, he was in the employment of Government, but not as a soldier. This uncle, whose name was Patrick Wyntoun, was a widower, supposed to be wealthy, and was the father of one child—a daughter, named Fanny Hume Wyntoun, fully ten years of age. The only certain proof which the Welltones possessed of their uncle's riches, was based upon the annual present which he usually sent them about Christmas. This merry season was again approaching; both the young ladies were growing nervous, and at odd hours would commence discussing the probable character and value of the expected package. I rather suspect that the dashing sisters were at this particular time unusually hard up. Whatever the Indian present might be, therefore, it could neither come too soon nor be too bulky.

At length, one morning within a week of Christmas, the postman was seen advancing towards their cottage, a sight which set their heart into a high state of nervous palpitation. This, they declared, must be the usual letter heralding the Indian hamper. Letter it certainly was, and from India, too; but its contents only revealed that these extravagant sisters could no longer expect to receive either letters or presents from the East. Their uncle was dead! He had died of a fever caught during a journey down the Jumna, from Delhi to Allahabad. The letter was written by a friend of Mr. Wyntoun, who attended him in his illness, and received his last brief instructions—which related chiefly to the future of his poor little daughter Fanny, who had been living with friendly neighbours in Calcutta during her father's long absence in the interior of the country. It was Mr. Wyntoun's earnest desire—so ran the letter—that his daughter should be sent home to England and to the care of her cousins—the Misses Welltone, Tenderlynn, Mellowshire. It was a great shock to these expectant ladies to learn that their uncle had died shamefully poor—leaving little more, indeed, than would decently fetch Fanny home; and that the last present which they would receive from Calcutta should be, of all things on earth, a living creature! and one, too, of their own species! I am ashamed, Athene, to have to tell you so wicked a thought; but I really do think that,

if their poor little cousin had been a monkey instead of a maiden, she would have been a great deal more welcome to the gayest, though neither the wealthiest nor the wisest cottage in Flowerdale. The monkey would have proved immensely attractive to the young gentlemen of Tenderlynn; while Fanny, it was already anticipated, would only be an unmanageable encumbrance.

It was, therefore, with feelings of disappointment and chagrin that Louisa and Caroline Welltone waited the arrival of their orphan cousin from India. But it was a fortunate thing that the child happened to reach Vale Cottage on the very day before Christmas. At that season all hearts, even the flintiest, open somewhat to the genial sacred influences of the time. Everybody about Tenderlynn was in the excitement of preparation for the morrow's festivities; and, consequently, nobody had time or room for the expression of the heartless thoughts of the head. Fanny Wyntoun's reception was, indeed, hardly what it might have been; but, taking all things into account, it was by no means unkindly. For the present, at least, the sisters exerted themselves with a fair show of heartiness and good nature, and contrived to make their cousin's position comfortable, if not perfectly happy. The black-eyed, dark-haired little lady had just entered her eleventh year; and, although the shadow of her father's death still lay on her memory, she enjoyed her first Christmas in England with evident pleasure. She was greatly liked by the Christmas party at Vale Cottage. Her sad history; her quiet, graceful appearance; and some very peculiar charm in her manner—which everybody felt but nobody could explain—created in her favour a decided and honourable feeling of friendship. This feeling was deepened in the hearts of the guests by the style in which the little child sung a couple of songs. They were extremely simple things—one a cradle song, set to music, which seemed to have been blown across a field of poppies; and the other, the song of the sea-wind, which had something so altogether rich and strange in its breezy melody, as at once to flood the mind with a beautiful vision of the sea. Both of these songs little Fanny learned from her Hindoo nurse, Aldee—a woman who had been brought from the Upper Ganges to watch over the delicate infancy of the English child.

At the conclusion of the party, Fanny was a general favourite; but, unhappily, not a particular favourite of her cousins, who were rather piqued at the deep interest which all seemed to take in the Indian waif—so they called her—that had been sent to them from the land of the rising sun.

CHAPTER II.

NIGHTINGALE, MERMAID, AND GHOST.

Did you not tell me, Athene, when we visited Tenderlynn, two years ago, that you liked the village so much that you could dwell in it for ever? I do not wonder at that. Of all the sea-villages I know, it is by far the loveliest. Tenderlynn is the mildest nook in Mellowshire, and Mellowshire is the mildest county in England. Couched in the innermost bend of a bay, with a range of romantically tumbled cliffs to the north; to the south, the most radiant of sandy beaches; and, behind, the great woods and gentle hills of Flowerdale, receding slowly and gradually from the sea, as if unwilling to be placed so far inland from the shining brine—it is a nest in which the Fairy Queen might have set up a new throne, and forgotten that there was any other land of Faery. It is a place which no

one can choose but love; and like you, Athene, I love it very dearly—so dearly, indeed, that often in the middle of the crowded street it starts into my mind like a sudden vision, when the city vanishes into its own dusky air, and for a brief but delicious interval I wander on the self-same sands where, you remember, we used to race and scamper, or watch the distant ships as they melted, like white-winged pilgrim doves, into the dim light of the evening sky.

If boys and girls, and men and women, could be happy at all, would you not think that it should be in beautiful Tenderlynn?

'Ah! surely it should. I should like so much to return to the dear old town! How very, very happy must Fanny Wyntoun have been to have a home in so sweet a place.'

Nay, there you are mistaken. The pretty little maiden was quite otherwise than happy—she was, indeed, extremely miserable. You open your eyes, and seem to wonder at that. I am sorry to say, Athene, that there is nothing in the sad truth so very wonderful after all. The sorrow of the world is more than you think, or can yet know it to be. I, knowing the griefs of men, do not wonder at them; but to me it is always a sad thing to see children so young as Fanny Wyntoun so deeply unhappy as she was, even amid the peaceful beauty of Tenderlynn. But grief is no respecter of persons, times, or places. It will enter the heart of a king in his palace, on his coronation-day, with as little compunction as it entered the tender breast of poor Fanny.

But you ask with your eyes what was the reason of Fanny's unhappiness? Her cousins did not love her. This was the source of all her woe; and a poisonous source it was. After that Christmas night, when the child made so many friends by her singing, both Louisa and Caroline began to regard her with an evil eye, as if afraid that the little Indian would before long supplant them in the affection and admiration of the young gentlemen of Tenderlynn. But any person looking at the three together would have had no fear of such a terrible result. The two sisters were tall, and exceedingly handsome; while their cousin was a small thin creature—the veriest reed beside a couple of great chesnut trees in full blossom. Yet these fair sisters had one notable defect. They resembled certain Abyssinian birds, which, so far as shape, size, and plumage are concerned, are all that the vainest of birds, not excepting the peacock, could desire. When you see or imagine these splendid creatures, it is almost an insult to be told that they are as tuneless as the pebbles of the Nile, on which they perch and pick at the sacred mud. Yet so it is. It was just the same with the Welltones, who thus singularly belied their name—the Welltones having, in music, no tones whatever; while the frail and insignificant Fanny possessed the purest soul of music—which is surely one of the divinest gifts which the Heavenly Powers can bestow upon mortal man or woman.

Thus it came about that Fanny was disliked, hated, neglected, and so rendered miserable. Being entirely dependent upon her cousins, she was employed about the cottage; and she was compelled to work, and did work with all the quiet diligence of a good servant. Her education was entirely neglected; and had it not been for the early training which she received in India, when her father and mother were alive, she might have been as ignorant as the commonest drudge of the kitchen, for all that her cousins cared. Nor is this the worst. While her cousins dressed like fine ladies, attended balls and parties, had parties of their own in Vale Cottage, the little slave,

although of their own flesh and blood, was held so much in the background, that at last she ceased altogether to appear at any party where her selfish mistresses wished to come out in undisputed splendour. So cruelly hard did Fanny's position become, that it was quite clear she was not only over-worked, but also under-fed. You may well start, Athene, and doubt the truth of what I tell you. But it is all too sadly true—true as the gospel of sorrow.

For awhile at first, the people about Tenderlynn, whom the Welltones knew, were loud in their praise for having given their poor cousin a home. But the word *home* was too sacred a word to apply to Vale Cottage, so far as Fanny was concerned. To the happy, the word *home* is a full heaven of joyous recollections. The remembrance of her home in Calcutta—with all the tender blandishments of a father, a mother, and a nurse's love—only served to make Fanny's present situation more awfully wretched. For you must know, Athene, that it is not the memory of past joys, but the hope and expectation of future happiness, that can make our present misery endurable. Neither mind nor body can live on the memory of past feasts. Alas! Fanny was almost destitute of hope. She seemed to be fixed in the middle of a wide moor, beside a dismal pool, alone with the demon of despair, who was devouring her heart, and prompting her soul to commit an unspeakable crime. Yet the poor child, though neglected by human kindred, was not deserted by the good angels which attend on the sad soul of oppressed and tempted innocence. It was well for Fanny Wyntoun that she had been born of noble and wise parents. They taught her a great many good things, which she now remembered and cherished as the most precious jewels of her Indian childhood—they were the sole fortune which her father and mother were able to leave their delicate little girl. One of these things—the one which she had been most carefully taught—was the habit of saying her evening and morning prayers. These were so very simple in expression, that no doubt they might have been laughed at by the careless Welltones, had Fanny not taken care to repeat them in secret. Simple as they were, however, they brought to the child's heart great floods of consolation, on which she was lifted far beyond the darkness of her mortal misery. This was like a good little girl; and as mamma and I have often told you, Athene, all little maidens who remember their prayers so regularly, as Fanny did in her sorrow, are sure to find comfort and strength to do their worst as well as their best duties; or, as your friend the poet rather curiously says:—

*Prayer lightens and brightens and mightens
The heart and the mind and the soul.'

So Fanny's heart was greatly lightened of its weight of grief; her mind became clearer, so that she was able to know the right from the wrong; and her pure soul was strengthened more and more to grapple with her darkest sufferings, and make the best of the worst in the spirit of man's tenderest and truest Friend. One of her prayers was in verse—two stanzas only of which I can remember. Perhaps you would like to learn it. It is not so simple as the one which Silvertongue, Sphinx, and you can repeat. But hear it:—

FAITH IN SORROW.

Dear Father! who art ever nigh
With holy hand and healing breast,
Oh! hear me—hear me while I cry,
And send me patience, peace, and rest!

Within the shadow of my grief
I wait for Thy divine relief.

Though blind with woe, I feel, I see
That Thou dost keep Thy promised tryste;
My soul is raised; I walk with Thee—
One hand within the hand of Christ!

But Fanny gained some consolation from another source. The simple songs which she had learned on the banks of the Ganges, from the lips of her mother and her nurse, often flowed into her memory, like voices from a distant land and a far-off time; and it was really wonderful how they soothed her in her sorrow, as she wandered among the cliffs of Tenderlynn bay, or hung like a dreaming flower over the grassy brim of the beautiful Pool Water. Of course, the poor child was too much of a drudge to be allowed many of these wanderings. Whenever she did enjoy them, however, her position always seemed for a time a little less dismal than the reality. Many curious stories are told about Fanny's wanderings and singings among the rocks, or in the woody hollows. Her voice was one of the most melodious that ever was heard in the dells of Tenderlynn; and in the twilight, when she sat on the edge of a rock overhanging the slumbering gulfs of the bay, chanting some weird Indian airs, the more superstitious of the boatmen and sailors mistook her for a mermaid. In truth, she was known in the village as the Nightingale, the Mermaid, and the singing Ghost—the last name being applied to her in derision by her tuneless cousins. I remember well—But what is this? Is Athene actually asleep?

'No; I am wide awake. I was only thinking how fine it must have been to hear so sweet and sad a nightingale singing in the dark wood.'

I have heard her singing in a much pleasanter position, but not as Fanny Wyntoun—where, instead of trees and seas, she had thousands of human ears to drink in her miraculous strains.

'Not as Fanny Wyntoun! What, then, was her name; and where was it you heard her?'

I shall come to that presently. But mark, first, what occurred to Fanny during her last twilight song on Tenderlynn cliffs. This is the turning point in the little Indian's career; and ought to be interesting, if I can do it justice. It was on a delightful evening, about the end of August, that the neglected little child had slipped quietly from Vale Cottage, and took a roundabout way to her own peculiar seat among the rocks, which now bears the name of 'The Mermaid's Cliff.' The spirit of the girl was exceedingly sad; for, on that particular day, the heartless Welltones had used her with unusual harshness. More keenly than ever did she feel the misery of her dependent condition; and, as she sat on the bare rock in silence, she looked across the sea with a sad, scared face, as if in search of something she could not discover. Her memory was busy with the past. In the dark, deep, yet waveless agony of her mind, her early home, by the mighty Indian stream, was the only human vision that relieved her moods of awful abstraction. Her soul was clothed in the blackest shadows of melancholy; and even in spite of her infantile faith, she was on that night as near the edge of despair as of the dark oily sea at her feet. Indeed, for a moment, in the mental perplexity of the child, the two seemed to be only one perilous, heart-piercing edge. It was a fearful situation for so young and so sad a heart.

But the darker moods of youth seldom continue long at a time; and so, after awhile, the clouds of melancholy which overhung Fanny's mind began to shake and move, as if blown by a wind; and then they turned and twisted, and showed little rifts and gaps, through which she caught occasional glimpses of white light—a vagrant star or two, and something like a silver skiff sailing in a sea of steady blue, carrying a beautiful round shadow, like a prophecy in the mouth of a prophet, the fulfilment of which would flood the land and the sea with light.

So Fanny grew less sad; and it was not long before she began to warble, in a soft irregular undertone, stray notes of some strange melody. By-and-by her voice swelled larger and broader, like light spreading from a centre; and the liqueous tones seemed to break like waves upon

the cliffs, but float like enchantment over the misty sea. It was an Indian song, which she and her nurse used to sing together—the one leading and the other replying—its name being ‘The Wind’s reply to the Stream.’ Just as she had finished her part of the song, she almost fell into the sea with terror to hear a clear mellow voice sing the identical answer which her nurse was accustomed to make in the happy days of childhood! She started to her feet and peered into the waves, for it was from the sea that the voice was sounding. True to the character of the music, the voice now rolled out the windy melody as if it would shake the sleeky brine into bearded billows, and toss the ships from their anchors; and then it would pause and moan, as if wearied by its long wrestle with the deep; but, continuing fitfully to writhe and sigh, it illusively passed away into the cool vacancies of the north.

To Fanny’s mind, so apt a reply to her song seemed a most wonderful thing, and was for a time altogether beyond her comprehension. Although more masculine in its higher tones, she imagined that the voice sounded sometimes marvellously like that of her Indian nurse. At length she heard the plash of oars, as if approaching the shore, slightly to the left of where she stood above; then she caught sight of a boat, containing two figures—one at the oars—the other, muffled like a woman, sitting at the helm;—at which the half-frenzied child descended the rocks to meet the skiff, with the strange fancy in her heart that she was about to meet an old friend.

As she reached the shore, the figures had landed; and she at once perceived they were only a couple of strangers—a lady and gentleman—who had been out in the bay, to enjoy the cool beauty of the evening. Yet although they were utterly unknown to Fanny, as well as she to them, they were both so kindly, and so remarkably shrewd, that they contrived to extract the child’s history from her in a twinkling, which she related without the smallest hesitation. Their actual reason for landing at that particular point of the bay was, if possible, to discover the owner of the voice on the cliffs, to which the gentleman had so promptly replied. He seemed to be perfectly acquainted with the music; and, indeed, with all kinds of music; and he professed himself both delighted and astonished to hear one of his favourite melodies apparently sung to him out of the clouds. The lady and gentleman took an immense liking for Fanny—as all kind-hearted sensible persons would have done. Both spoke to her as if she had been their own child; and, very naturally I think, it came about that Fanny conceived a most confiding regard for them. So, at last, the gentleman asked her suddenly if she would like to go with them to London. She was rather taken aback by the question, and took some time to recover herself. Even then she hesitated, notwithstanding the lady’s kindly persuasions. But they did not press her to answer finally—they would wait till to-morrow, when they would call at Vale Cottage, and discuss the question with her cousins, whom they appeared to have every hope of convincing of the propriety and advantage of the scheme.

That night, Fanny was a little later than usual in going home; and her already brimming cup of misery was made to overflow, by the ill-tempered abuse of the Welltones—one of whom, in her evil passion, struck the thin reed of a girl, making her stagger till she fell, and almost breaking her heart.

That night, Fanny did not forget to breathe her simple prayer, after which she went to bed; and dreamed that the King and Queen were coming to visit her.

Next day, it turned out precisely as the sea-sent stranger had foretold. The Welltones parted with their little cousin with not a single feeling of regret. I am really ashamed, Athene, to tell you the truth this time; but the truth of the matter is, that these hard-hearted women were glad to get quit of their last Indian present, merely because they could not eat it, or exhibit it at Mellowshire county ball, in the shape of some splendid feather, or as a bit of priceless lace.

Two days after this, Fanny Wyntoun took leave of Tenderlynn, and, with her new friends, soon arrived in London; where she was taught the principles of music, and the principles of everything that goes to make a real Christian lady.

CHAPTER III.

CINDERELLA THE SINGER.

Are you a good jumper, Athene?

‘Only middling. I don’t think I could leap over Farmer Boulton’s little mill-stream. Fred Escombe can fly over it like a wild deer. And, besides, though he was to fall into the water, Katie Hasley, the dairymaid, says that Freddy is such a duck of a boy he would be sure to swim.’

Indeed! I am not so sure about that. Fred Escombe has no downy feathers to bear him up, although I am quite certain that he is sometimes a little goose. Neither has he web feet, which are the great duck propellers. I remember, at least, before he began to wear shoes, that his toes appeared to be distinctly separate, just like the toes of Silvertongue. Perhaps, however, the webs began to grow upon him; and being ashamed, he put on shoes to hide his relationship to the ducks. People, you know, often wear boots and shoes for other than mere reasons of comfort. But, about jumping—do you think that you could leap over a mill-stream eight years wide?

‘That would be a funny jump! Who could do that?’

Well, you could do it, with a little help from your memory. How old are you just now?

‘Eight years, next April.’

That is the very wideness of the mill-stream I was talking about. Now, suppose other eight years were come and gone, how old would you be then?

‘About sixteen.’

Quite right. Ah! then will come the golden age. Should you live, you will then be a tall girl.

‘I shall be as big as Helen Escombe, who is going up to London next week to live for three months. Shall I go to London, too, when I am Helen’s age?’

Perhaps you may. But I see that you can jump over a gap of eight years pretty well. That is just what I desired.

‘Why did you wish me to look so far forward?’

You shall see.

It was about eight years after Fanny Wyntoun bade farewell to the beautiful village of Tenderlynn, along with her new friends, Philip Rhondo and his lady-wife. Such were the names of the strangers. Now, this Philip Rhondo was a celebrated musician. He could not only make music, but he could also sing it, and perform it on more instruments than one. The flute, the violin, and the organ were his favourite instruments; but nothing delighted him more than to take command of a host of performers—whom, with the aid of a little silver baton, with a jewel in each end, he led to many a splendid triumph. At that time, there lived not his equal in England.

He was also very clever in judging whether any particular voice was capable of being trained to do great things. This was the reason that, from the boat in the gloom of the sea, he was able to detect, in the voice of the little mermaid, the spirit of one who could be little less than a wonder. You see, then, why Philip Rhondo was so eager to take Fanny Wyntoun with him to London. Both he and his wife (who was one of the very best of wives) determined to act as if the helpless girl were their own child—a resolve which, I am happy to say, they carried out in the kindest and most liberal manner. Nothing that could be done was left undone to perfect Fanny in every accomplishment that becomes a lady. But the good musician took especial delight in training into full blossom the musical genius of the little Indian. So, at the end of eight years, when Fanny had reached her twentieth summer, she was as good, and as handsome, and as accomplished a lady as any good, handsome, and accomplished gentleman could desire to set eyes on, with or without the aid of an opera-glass. Fanny had a style of beauty which the minute inspection of the strongest glass could not lessen.

You may well imagine that it was not long before the tongue of Rumour began to wag on the subject of Fanny’s musical powers; and also about her origin—what she was, and whence she came. As the time approached when her genius was to be tested before one of the shrewdest and most critical audiences in the kingdom, the tongue of Rumour was completely blistered, from the point to the very root, by the tremendous work it had to perform in gossiping to the great long ears of the Public—which it

is awfully difficult, if not impossible, to satisfy. What idle people are capable of devouring, in the matter of pepper-and-mustard reports, is altogether marvellous! I verily believe that the ears of Gossip are as deep as the Black Gentleman's dice-box, which is reputed to have begun, long before the invention of Lucifer-matches, to devour the fortunes of gamblers, liars, and backbiters; notwithstanding which, it is currently reported to be even yet about twenty million miles deeper than the bottomless pit of *Macbeth's* witches, in the dismal dells of Acheron.

What Rumour did invent about the new 'star' who was about to burst upon the world with twenty-comet brilliancy,—it makes me laugh every time I think of it. One story represented the unknown Fanny as the daughter of an Italian noble, whose fortune went to the dogs only three days before himself—his only child being thus left in beggary, and compelled to sing for a living. This story was a favourite among Italian refugees in London, who were at that time extremely fond of upholding their country as the mother of every excellent thing except freedom—a statement which was, of course, an entire mistake, freedom her own divine self being everywhere the mother of all excellence; thus showing that the virtues of which the poor refugees boasted must have been second-handed ones after all—Italian shadows of English realities.

In reply to this story of Italian Rumour, English Rumour was wont to wink knowingly, and exclaim—'I know better. I know as well as you the difference between vermicelli and silk-worms, or Pope's-eye steak and Bull-beef. The fact of the matter is this, and you may rely upon it:—One evening, a few years ago, as a great English tenor singer—you know whom I mean—was passing along the street from the theatre, about half-way home, he heard a tiny voice mewling in the gutter, as if engaged in some discussion with Death. Scanning the object closely, yet cautiously, he found a little cherub of a child, wrapped in a yard of blanket. Now, the great Tenor's heart was more than usually tender, for the gods had been propitious to him that evening; so, he took the helpless creature home to his grandmother, who, on seeing the contents of the blanket carefully unrolled, shouted—"Saints!" and "Bless my twenty-five wits! what a lovely child!" concluding with the stern expression—"The heartless slut!" meaning the person who, in the face of all the stars, had dared to desert her own flesh and blood so heartlessly in the streets of the city. But the old dame gave the child bread and milk; and, when it grew old enough, the great Tenor gave it teaching—reading, writing, and music—what you will; so, between them both, here is a singer come with news from heaven, to shame the beldame falsehood from the world, and make us saints!'

Were not these pretty forgeries, Athene? The making of the moon out of green cheese is nothing to them.

But, to tell you the truth, my dear, there was a very great interest indeed taken in the new *prima donna*, whose name was at last published as Cinderella. So absolute a change from Fanny Wyntoun may surprise you, Athene; but, at that time, it was quite customary for both ladies and gentlemen to adopt professional names, which was done from the most honourable of motives.

By good chance, I happened to be in London at the time; and, more fortunate still, had the remarkably good luck to procure a place in the stalls. The night at length arrived, and I declare to you, Athene—and to you, also, Mother of Immortals—that I never did behold such a tremendous theatrical siege. I wonder to this day why the people escaped being completely pounded into human jelly, by the rush on rush that was made towards the theatre—the largest, by-the-by, which the city yet possessed. They did escape, however; and, when the house was rather inconveniently crammed, it presented a spectacle of splendour which would have made the French fashionable world, even under the beautiful Empress Grendoleen, turn up the whites of its supercilious eyes in a sort of millenarian ecstasy. It would, I assure you. Take the two most celebrated books of modern times—"The London Directory" and "Burke's British Peerage"—and pick the best names from both, and you will be quite certain of having the cream of that famous audience. There were three dukes, and their enthusiastic

duchesses, who travelled two hundred miles to be present at Cinderella's first opera. If that does not convince you of the immense sensation which was then produced in London—nay, even in England—I have only to finish you off by stating that the very Mayor of Tenderlynn, with four of his aldermen, and one or two other people, not worth naming just yet—all came to London with as much fervour as certain famous pilgrims used to trudge to the shrine of Canterbury!

I am perfectly afraid, Athene, to describe to you the character of the performance. The opera was composed for the occasion by Cinderella's truest friend, Philip Rhondo, who sat that evening on the orchestral throne, wielding the little sceptre with the jewel in each end. Never before, I believe, did that little instrument sparkle and flash with such imperial radiance, grace, and intelligence. It actually seemed to move of its own accord, like the staff of a prophet transformed into a living serpent, for the sheer purpose of confounding all disbelievers in the musically divine supremacy of Cinderella. If there was really any truth in this idea, it was perfectly successful. Mr. Rhondo's work was declared by the *Times*, the *Athenaeum*, and other musical authorities, to be the most delicious piece of operatic composition which had been produced for fifty years; and the new *prima donna* was lauded as being the greatest that had ever appeared in England. The latter criticism was at least emphatically true. I will not, because I cannot, describe my own sensations under the spell of Cinderella. I shall merely mention that it made knightly warriors forget their stars and garters, and duchesses forget their zones of gold and coronets of gems—a couple of the most marvellous things which have occurred since the institution of Rascaldom in England by Sir Mordred, King Arthur's wicked nephew—of whom I read to you only the other evening, in Mr. Tennyson's golden 'Idylls,' which ought to be recommended to all saints worthy of the name.

At the conclusion of the piece, there burst forth such an awful series of bravos and cheers as make these feeble words of mine the most beggarly rags of English. It was three thousand shouting like one. Never was the blazing word 'triumphant' more properly applied to any musical performance than to Cinderella's 'first appearance.'

But now, Athene, one of the most curious features of the evening remains to be told; and I have purposely avoided earlier mention of it, in order that you might see it when the dust of applause has cleared away. Near the conclusion of the second part of the opera, when Cinderella—who represented the character of a neglected and cruelly-oppressed maiden—had reached one of the most pathetic and heart-melting passages in the piece, the whole audience became completely fascinated and spell-bound under the liquid expression of her melodious woe. I never beheld so many people whose very existence appeared so visibly to hang upon the continuance of the singer's voice. It put me in mind of a huge ship, full of people, carried up a great swell of the sea, and suspended for a brief space—a space in which time seems, in the agony of the imagination, to stretch into eternity. At this breathless juncture, several sudden but half-smothered cries of pain rose from the middle of the pit, and were heard in every part of the theatre. 'Being in the stalls, I distinctly heard the name 'Fanny Wyntoun' gasped out several times, by the person or persons whose involuntary exclamation had disturbed and somewhat angered the rapt audience. At that time, I knew nothing whatever of Fanny Wyntoun, not even the name; and I was therefore altogether in the dark as to the meaning of the expressions. That part of the opera immediately afterwards came to an end, and before the ringing cheers had entirely died away, I observed that one lady in the pit had fainted, and was carried out, attended by another lady and one gentleman, both of whom were ghastly white. I at once concluded that it must have been one or all of that party of three who had uttered the painful cries. This guess was perfectly correct; but I did not learn the fact till several years after, when I was told the whole of this curious story.

Now, who do you think these three were—who, of all that vast assembly, appeared to be the only persons who knew the private name of Fanny, and who seemed also

to be peculiarly affected by her singing? Can you not guess, Athene?

'No; I cannot think who they could be.'

Well, they were neither more nor less than Fanny Wyntoun's cruel-hearted cousins, the Welltones, all the way from Tenderlynn. What do you think of that, my girl? Wasn't it very like a judgment on the foolish pair? The gentleman who accompanied them was the husband of Caroline, she who had fainted. About three years after Fanny had vanished from Tenderlynn, this once dashing belle—finding it impossible to catch the curate or the banker, at both of whom she had set her cap—was compelled at length to sacrifice herself upon John Ashville, a jolly master-butcher of the village, who, in spite of his wife, had so thriven in the world, that he was made an alderman, and was able, therefore, to accompany his musical friend the mayor, to see and hear the mysterious Cinderella. John Ashville was kind enough to invite his wife's still unmarried sister, Louisa, to bear them company to London. Of course, all thought of Fanny had vanished from their minds. She might have been dead for aught they knew, or seemed to care. When, therefore, they discovered in the full-blown rose of womanhood, which Cinderella did now most truly appear, the pale worthless bud that they had so ruthlessly thrust from their door, they felt as if they were suddenly confronted by an avenging angel. The discovery of their once wronged but now triumphant cousin struck them to the heart like a sword of lightning.

They went back to Tenderlynn a sadder couple than they had come to London; and I think that their wisdom, also, was slightly increased.

From the first night of her appearance, Cinderella became all the rage. There never was a singer like Cinderella. The very walls of London seemed to blossom with the name of Cinderella. Her name was in everybody's mouth, and her image was in everybody's heart. The young fellows all fell in love with Cinderella. It was told me for a truth that one or two actually went mad for love of the great and the beautiful prima donna; and I have it from good authority that, before she was six months before the public, she had received six offers of marriage—one of them from a duke! I do not wonder at all this—it was the natural homage which beauty, goodness, and greatness, combined in a youthful maiden, never fail to command.

But Cinderella, without being insensible to the genuine admiration they implied, resisted all such advancements, from whatever quarter they came. So, for two years, she pursued a most successful career, visiting the principal English and Continental cities, always accompanied by her accomplished master and benefactor, Philip Rhondo, who, being otherwise independent, followed his great pupil, through pure love of the divine art, and, wherever she went, smoothing her way in matters of which she was necessarily ignorant.

CHAPTER IV.

OLD FRIENDS AND NEW TIES.

Wink! wink! wink! Why, Athene, you are almost gone! Just keep up for two minutes more, and I shall make the rest of the story as short as little Typoo's tail.

But stay, you shall finish it yourself. You observe this scrap of an old *Times* newspaper for December 24, 184—. Look at the first column, and read what you see at the place crossed with a pen.

'Oh, that's about marriages!'

Well! whose is the one you see marked?

'Hurrah! hurrah! mamma, it is Cinderella's! Here it is:—

"On the 23d inst. at St. John's Church, City, by the Very Rev. Dean Jewel, assisted by the Rev. D. L. Ashley, Edwin Albino Rhondo, Under-Secretary to the Governor-General of India, and only son of Philip Rhondo, the composer, to Cinderella Fanny Hume, only surviving child of the late Patrick Wyntoun, of Her Majesty's Civil Service, Bengal."

Is that not satisfactory? You still appear to be somewhat puzzled. Here, then, is a paragraph in the *Morning Post*, of nearly the same date as the *Times*' announcement,

which I think will effectually resolve the apparent riddle of the marriage. Just allow me to read it:—

'MARRIAGE OF CINDERELLA.—The marriage of our greatest *prima donna* with the son of our greatest composer is, in many respects, one of the most notable events of the present season. As our readers are already well acquainted with the English part of Cinderella's biography, which is altogether unique in its pathos and its triumph, we refrain at present from making special reference to it. It will be remembered that, on the death of her father, Mr. Patrick Wyntoun, Cinderella was sent home to England, at a very tender age, to the care of two near relatives. That she brought with her almost nothing for her future maintenance is a fact also quite patent to the public; but the reason of it has hitherto remained a mystery. We are in a position to supply the true explanation. Before he died, Mr. Wyntoun was engaged in a law-suit, involving property to the value of a hundred and twenty thousand pounds. The case was an exceedingly protracted one, and promised to rival some of our more famous Chancery suits. So much money did Mr. Wyntoun spend in seeking justice, that when his sudden death occurred he was nearly penniless. His daughter, as we have seen, was sent to England. By good fortune, it fell to the lot of Mr. Edwin A. Rhondo to complete the arrangements for Miss Wyntoun's departure from Calcutta—a duty which he discharged with such effect and delicacy, as to secure many additional comforts for the child during her tedious voyage. Mr. Rhondo, we believe, has been in England at least once since that period; but it was at a time when he could know nothing of the miserable condition of Cinderella at the village of T—. His last absence in India has been the longest; and he was thus only made acquainted with the fact that his father had picked up his former acquaintance, about six months before her *debut* on the stage of — Theatre. He returned to England in time to witness the triumphant reception of Cinderella. There were two special features about Mr. Rhondo's return which we have great pleasure in recording in conclusion. He brought the gratifying news that Mr. Wyntoun's law-suit—having been continued by two Calcutta merchants, close friends of the deceased—had resulted in favour of Cinderella—which, it was surmised, would be as good as seventy thousand pounds to her, after the payment of all expenses. But, besides bringing this news, Mr. Rhondo had actually brought Cinderella's Hindoo nurse. Faithful and tender-hearted Aldee had never forgotten the child whom she had suckled and tended from its birth on the banks of the Ganges. She watched with eager interest the course of her late master's law-suit; and when it was finished in favour of his surviving daughter, and knew that Mr. Rhondo was about to return to England, she besought him with such irresistible pathos to take her to see her dear English child, that he determined to accede to her passionate desire. We believe that Aldee suffered greatly on the voyage; and we have been told that the meeting between the two long separated friends was one of the most indescribably melting scenes that was ever witnessed by human eyes.

Our task is done. The reader can easily imagine the beginning of that mutual attachment between Mr. Edwin A. Rhondo and Cinderella, whose happy consummation took place only two days ago.

If anything could possibly be imagined to sadden the bridal ceremony, it would perhaps be the absence of Aldee. This most loyal and affectionate creature only survived her arrival in England about six months. But, knowing that her child was safe, the Hindoo nurse died happy, trusting in the merciful Father of all living, whom she had been taught to worship by the parents of Cinderella, in happy days long ago on the banks of her Indian stream.'

EPILOGUE.

Narrator.—Come now, both of you, tell me whether you are satisfied with the fortunes of Cinderella? Were they too great or too small—too easily won or tardy in coming?

House-Mother.—It is my opinion that the end is altogether satisfactory; but you were rather tedious in arriving at it. I do not think that Cinderella's fortunes were a bit too great—nothing being too great for one so

sensible, patient, and good. Cinderella, like all of her superior genius, was evidently greater than any possible fortune. Besides, to such persons, fortune comes neither too soon nor too late—coming, as it generally must, as the rigid consequence of severe and patient though active endurance, sometimes amounting to as black and as fiery a sweat as any African slave ever poured from his manacled soul and body.

Athene.—It was very neat of young Mr. Rhondo to bring home news of the Indian fortune. And then to think that he should fetch dear old Aldee from the banks of the Ganges; and then marry Cinderella, whom he had met so many years before! It was very neat. But it is a fine story. I should like to hear Cinderella in one of her favourite operas. But does she sing at all now?

Narrator.—Not very often; and, when she does sing, it is as much for the benefit of others as for her own good. She is one of the most charitable women in England. Only think of her having privately saved Louisa Welltone, one of her bitter cousins, from actual beggary. Louisa married a commercial-traveller, who took her to the south of England, where they lived comfortably enough for some time. But Jack Highway seemed to be constructed on the principles of the steam-engine. He was always drinking, but never satisfied; always steaming, but never advancing his own fortunes; till at last he came into horrible collision with another Jack Highway, and, after a frightful attempt to tear each other's wheels off, burst each other's boilers, and do a hundred other terrible things, they tumbled over an embankment into a deep ditch, where they were found next morning, fastened to each other with the hooks of death, their mouths overflowing with congenial mud. There being no damages for such disgraceful deaths, Louisa and her two children were left entirely destitute. Cinderella had them quietly looked after, and made quite comfortable, so that the selfish cousin never so much as suspected that the relation she had so deeply wronged was her kind benefactress. That is only one of Cinderella's secret and silent charities. I ought to say, in conclusion, that the great singer is everywhere respected, and by everybody beloved. She received many splendid tokens of admiration, some of which were from persons of distinguished station and birth. But the most highly-prized of all her treasures is a beautiful bracelet, set with gems, which was presented to her by Her gracious Majesty, our own beloved Queen—whom the Heavens continually bless!

House-Mother.—Amen!

Athene.—Amen!

Narrator.—My tale is told. (*Clock strikes.*) Good night, Athene; that is eleven o'clock—which is a full hour beyond your usual time.

Athene.—Good-night, papa; and don't let that picture bewitch you any more.

(*Exeunt House-Mother and Athene—leaving Narrator sitting before the fire, with his eyes fixed on the very picture against which he has been warned. He consequently goes off into a mythological brown study, in the course of which he wanders up the glens of Olympus; and, singular to relate, comes to the edge of a burning crater, into which he is about to tumble, when his wife pulls him back by an occipital lock, whereat he awakens, and finds himself sprawling on the floor—saved, by a hair, from falling into his own fire. Has a hearty laugh, accompanied by the Mother of Immortals; smokes a weed, in which said Mother declines to share; and then retires to bed just as the midnight steeples are proclaiming that Christmas morn—white as the angel of charity—is winging her way from the under world, to make known to the sons of men that there may still be another living chance of redeeming the dead past.*)

CHRISTMAS.

HAPPY Christmas! gladsome Christmas!
Thou art with me once again;
Crown'd with red-ripe holly berries,
Hope and beauty in thy train.
Canst thou tell me, canst thou tell me,
All the changes thou hast seen—
Smiles on brightly beaming faces,
Shades where once such smiles have been?

Dost thou miss the voice of dear ones,
With their sweet and loving tones?
See around thee vacant places
In our dwellings, sad and lone?
Hast thou pass'd the darker dwellings,
Where so silently they sleep?
Hast thou thought on all who loved them,
Left behind to wait and weep?

Didst thou see the smile had faded
From a tender mother's face?
And the look of anxious watching
That was resting in its place?
Didst thou miss a sound of laughter,
And a step of bounding glee?
Did she tell thee, sadly, fondly,
Of her brave boy on the sea?

Hast thou stood beside the sick bed;
Watch'd the swiftly ebbing breath—
Seen the faces we love dearly
Shadow'd with the shades of death?
Cherish'd souls away are passing,
In a brighter land to dwell;
Voices which so oft have hail'd thee
Now must murmur forth 'farewell!'

Merry Christmas! happy Christmas!
Didst thou leave the halls of gladness
To effuse thy joyous smiles
O'er the homes of want and sadness?
Didst thou cheer the heart, nigh bursting
With its sorrow and its sighing?
Didst thou gather fondly round thee
Little hungry children, crying?

Tell me, tell me, dear kind Christmas!
Hast thou been where true friends meet;
For methinks I see thee smiling
Warmly, while they warmly greet?
Whisper softly, sly old Christmas!
Hast thou been—? My heart says where:
Didst thou look on aught that told thee
I was loved, remember'd there?

Didst thou know again, old Christmas!
That young girlish face so fair;
Know again those laughing blue eyes,
And those dancing curls of hair?
Why that look of thoughtful rapture,
Beaming with such trusting pride?
She has knelt before the altar—
Happy, guileless, blushing bride!

Sly old Christmas! kind old Christmas!
Hast thou in the chambers crept
Like a fairy, with thy love-gifts,
When the little nurslings slept?
Brightest eyes have shone yet brighter;
Sweet young voices raised a cheer;
Tiny feet have danced still lighter
When they knew that thou wast near.

Hast thou seen the little strangers
In this world of joy and care?
Didst thou smile upon them sweetly—
Breathe a blessing and a prayer?
Look around, thou dear old Christmas!
Speak to me of all that's past
Since we saw thy hoary visage,
Since in joy we hail'd thee last!

A. R. G.

* * The right of translation reserved by the Authors. Contributions addressed to the Editor will receive attention; but, as a general rule, he cannot undertake to return MSS. considered unsuitable.

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