

THE GIRL FROM MALTA.

CHAPTER I.

A RUINED LIFE.

IT was a calm southern night, with a silver moon shining serenely in a cloudless sky, and over the glittering expanse of ocean steamed the P. and O.'s vessel "Neptune" on her way from Brindisi to Malta. Every revolution of her powerful engines sent her plunging through the blue waters, with the waves breaking in tumbling masses of white foam from her towering sides. The passengers, numbering about three hundred, were all in high spirits, having had a most delightful voyage from Australia, and were looking forward, with pleasure, to their arrival at Valletta on the morrow.

Can there be anything in the world more pleasant than sea life on a steamship with jolly people? Any one, who is a good sailor, will answer "No," though perhaps Ulysses, who travelled over these same waters, might not agree, but then the wandering Greek had not a P. and O. steamer at his command.

On this charming night a dance was in progress on the hurricane deck, and the immense area had been draped with brilliantly coloured flags, thus turning it into an admirable ball-room. Miss Kate Lester, the belle of the ship,—a position she knew she occupied, and, by the way took full advantage of all benefits to be derived therefrom,—was the pianist, and was playing the "Venetia Valse," to which a number of young people were dancing. The white dresses of the ladies, the darker costumes of the men, and the vivid tints of the