

SOLITARY ISLAND

A NOVEL.

By REV. JOHN TALBOT SMITH.

CHAPTER XIII.—Continued.

"I have," said Frances—"just the sweetest things!" But Paul was suddenly downcast even under this criticism; for madame looked portentous, and "just the sweetest" was not the kind of poetry he looked upon as worthy of his genius.

"Well, I am not disposed to be too hard," said madame; "but if you ask favors, Mr. Rossiter, you must expect to grant them in return."

"Certainly," said he, "that is not to be doubted."

"I shall permit you to retain the room, then, but I shall ask a favor of you soon—a reasonable one, mind, which I expect to have granted immediately."

Mr. Rossiter was missed thenceforward from the table, and, in addition to cold, want of light, and stunted means, he had now to undergo the daily martyrdom of a cheap lunch in cheap quarters and among the cheapest sort of a crowd. The sight of a boy's sad face, however, would have made even real hardships delightful. Nor did his numerous poor even suspect how much this free-hearted, gentle, handsome young fellow suffered for their sake. Peter remorsefully saw how matters stood and annoyed his friend by shouting "mea culpa" and beating his breast whenever they chanced to meet.

CHAPTER XIV.

A few months of companionship placed the poet and the politician on a footing of intimacy, and insensibly began those confidences between the friends which make such an intimacy so delightful—the readiness to ask advice and assistance in present difficulties, and to receive them; the relating of future hopes and aspirations with the view of receiving the confirmation of the other's approval; and the youthful speculation on questions and matters which men never speak of to outsiders, except in a joking fashion. They never went beyond New York, strangely enough, in all their confidences, and neither was possessed of a single fact as yet in the other's past life; so that the story of the water color on the wall was yet untold, and the fate of the yachting party remained a painful mystery to Paul and induced many a poetic fancy and many a poetic effusion from his sentimental brain. They had their opinions of each other also as time deepened their intimacy. Florian had always prided himself on his ability to read character, and, in truth, he had something to be proud of, although he made mistakes often enough. He looked on Paul as a young man of natural poetic talent, perhaps genius, with strong, delicate sentiments and a fondness for the ideal—a man who would make a good friend, but not a very useful one, since he was of that sort which expects every one to be useful to them, and who indeed do reflect a glory on their helpers. That idea of utility was getting to be a very powerful one with him unconsciously. As to the past life of Paul, he never thought but once, and his conclusion was that the youth had come up as a flower, cared for tenderly, without much experience, doomed to make no impression on the world except to add to its momentary beauty. He had no past, in fact, that could have left any bitter traces on his soul. All this went to show how very little Florian really knew of his friend.

Paul thought Florian a genius of a high order and looked up to him. A man with a powerful array of statistics in his head, who could get up at a moment's notice, and cool, self-possessed, clear-headed, talk some for an hour; whose aim was already the Presidency, if he never said as much, and who was beginning in the right way to reach it, who was clearly a gentleman of the very highest order, inasmuch as adherence to principle and religion was added to outward courtesy of a superior kind, who was a man among men. It pleased the poet to discover that Florian had a past, of which he did not speak, and of which there were many traces in his character. When he looked at the painting picture Paul saw two expressions in his face that were eloquent of misery somewhat softened by time. When his gaze rested on the portrait on the bookcase he saw the same look of pain succeeded by one of resignation, and even of hope. How quickly and how fully the youth formed his conclusions! There was a

resemblance in Florian to the girl who stood in the yacht waving her handkerchief, and probably she was a relative whom some misfortune had snatched from him forever. But as to the other, who had no resemblance to him, she was perhaps his affianced, and circumstances which he hoped to overcome kept them apart. Paul laughed a little at his own inferences and the pain which the last one in particular gave him.

While they were gradually drawing more closely together the private affairs of each never troubled the other. Florian knew of the garret, but did not think it his business to interfere on the score of affection, and, moreover, he was not so ready at the present hour to think of others as formerly. Politics naturally more than most professions generates this selfishness. He had acquired his share already. And Paul, knowing the extremity of his own circumstances, felt to relate them even to a friend was only asking for an assistance which he did not absolutely need. One evening Florian came forth in evening costume, which Paul, not having any of his own, always admired.

There is to be a mass meeting to-night in O'Connell's behalf," said he; "would you like to come? I am the speaker."

"And I suppose England will receive the usual Irish cooking," said Paul, with some contempt. "I am English by descent."

"What a misfortune!" Though gravely said, Paul knew that he was laughing. "Will it do England any harm if she is shown her own misdoings and made to atone for them? Besides, it has become a political necessity in this country to propitiate the mere Irish. We have them solidly on our side and we must keep them there. Come and see how we do it."

"I thought you were Irish," said Paul, half surprised.

"By descent," said Florian, laughing again; "but that does not make me a sympathizer the more. Justice is the point, and if I were a Hottentot the commonest sense of humanity or political necessity would make me red-hot against Britishers at the present hour. Come, friend, and see us pull the lion's tail."

They went off together, and Florian would have secured his friend a seat on the platform, but the poet objected.

"I wish to see you as well as to hear you," said he, "and I can tell what the rabble think the better."

What the rabble thought of the rising political star was seen easily without going among them. A number of colorless dignitaries sat on the platform, men whose names had once been the war-cry of election time, who now, their usefulness long passed, were used as dummies to propitiate the Irish Demos without risk to the actual party leaders. How little they counted with the crowd was visible from its indifference to their presence and their short speeches, and the sudden thrill of awakening enthusiasm which struck them as with a lightning-flash when Florian came forward. His handsome presence and cool manner before the multitude and the dignitaries sent a shiver of envious delight through Paul's veins. Florian was sure of himself; he never in such a scene appeared without making a mark which raised his name higher in the party honor-list, and he was about to score a success which would dim earlier triumphs. His popularity expressed itself in the thunderous applause with which the audience greeted the first words of that strong, melodious, catching voice. Then the speech began. It was the usual arraignment of England and panegyric of O'Connell, but arraignment and panegyric were alike of so unusual a power and brilliancy that Paul sat amazed and stunned. Was this the grave, steady lawyer whom he had left but a little while before at the entrance of the platform, whom he had known for months as an every-day man and never dreamed of as possessed of this sublime power of eloquence? Was it really Florian Wallace—this physical giant whose eye beamed and grew like the rising sun, whose lip and cheek paled and flushed with every passing feeling, and whose words, like arrows shooting everywhere, drew from this mass of men, tears, sobs, moans, curses, laughter and applause? They were an excitable crowd, indeed, but the melting pathos of those words drew the silent tears from Paul himself, and its scorn,

hate, mirth, denunciation roused the same feelings in his own bosom, though he made no display of them.

When the meeting was over Paul waited while the audience dispersed, and listened amusedly to the comments passed on the speaker. It was clear that Florian's name would be as familiar to that audience as the curses which they lavished on the hated Saxon. A number of the more excitable remained until they were able to reach the platform, where the honorable committee stood discussing matters and preparing for departure. The handshaking which Florian then endured, the hustling and good-natured boorishness of the crowd, amply made up, Paul thought, for the success of the oration. One boisterous constituent slapped him on the back with his left hand as he wrung his fingers out of shape with the right. "It's to Congress ye'll go, not to the Assembly," said he, "for the right stuff's in ye, me boy!"

Paul stared as he saw the thorough good humor and delight with which his friend endured the crowd, and he listened to the generous wit scattered so lavishly that it seemed like throwing pearls before swine. Behind him some stout individual was struggling with might and main to recover property which had dropped on the floor, and as he had the audacity to poke and thump the poet freely with his head and elbows, he received from Paul a withering and threatening look of interrogation.

"Bad luck to ye," said a well known voice, "is it the councillor's speech ye're tramping on? O Paul, is it your sweet face, b'y? And did ye ever hear the likes o' that speech since the day you were born? See, now, I don't think O'Connell himself, great as he is—and he's the greatest speaker in the world, past, present or to come—I don't think that the Kerry councillor could do better. What d'ye say? I'm going to report it for the Trumpeter, an' I must ask ye to help me get in the first part, for I wasn't here but the last five minutes, ye see, and only got in the peroration, mind. Now, that's what ye ought to be doing, instead of writing poor poetry getting five dollars and old Corcoran's thanks for your trouble, an' bringing on dyspepsia and a thousand other ills from the black grub ye're living on—"

Paul dashed from the crowd and away through the hall to the street. Peter was becoming a pest with his plans and advices. When Florian came out, and they were walking home through the quiet streets, Paul said:

"It's a pity that Coriolanus had never the advantage of seeing you among the mob before he stood to solicit votes for the consulship."

"I am glad you feel disgusted," said Florian, smiling, much to the poet's surprise, since he had not thought his tones expressed any disgust. "For it is the measure of my success with that very mob. You are quite an aristocrat, Paul. You saw I liked the flattery of the mob."

"And that disgusted me more. The dirt of some of those who shook hands with—ugh! And prosperous dirt, too! If they were poor there would be some excuse."

"And they are poor," said Florian—"tenement-livers, poisoned as

to air, food, and water by the wealthy gentlemen you are so willing to shake hands with because they take a bath every day and would never slap you on the hand. Why, a better fellow than Larry Waters—Alderman Larry—never was seen! He is the soul of good fellowship, treats an honest man like a brother if he comes under his roof, is the terror and delight of his own ward, and a man of great influence. That would be enough to make his slap and his grasp tolerable, if nothing else would."

"Influence! influence!" moaned the poet. "Everything goes down before that. I begin to suspect your sincerity, Florian. Tell me, were you sincere in your speech to-night, or was it this influence you had in view, and was this your incense to the god?"

Florian laughed a pleasant laugh of amusement.

"Now, Paul, you are really going too far," said he. "Motives are always mixed in this life. I did have in view this influence, and it stimulated me wonderfully. I assure you; nevertheless I was sincere in what I said, and just, too, I hope."

"I should hope not," said Paul impetuously, "otherwise I would never respect my descent again."

At which involuntary compliment to himself, the politician was silent, but pleased beyond measure.

"I have never heard an orator in a set oration until to-night, and I am amazed to know you possessed the gift to move an audience to such excesses of feeling. When did you get it, and where?"

"I was never really aware of it until I came to New York. Occasion developed it."

"What a godlike power it is," said Paul, looking at his friend as if a new light shone on him, "and what a delight and yet what a terror to know you possess it! It is as if a magician could do that which imperiled his life in the doing and which would make the world stare. Oh! you must have been sincere, or you would never have done it—never."

"How you harp on the sincerity!" said Florian, with one of the laughs which the poet never liked to hear from him. They gave him a hard aspect, and drove away those tender lines that more than anything else distinguished his face in Paul's eyes from the faces of the everyday world and gave it a place in the poet's radiant gallery of ideas.

"And whither is all this tending?" asked Paul with a trace of sarcasm in his smile. "Which is the bright particular star? Where is 'the height that lies forever in the light'?"

"I shall run for the Assembly first and from that mount into Congress," answered Florian, prosily.

"Oh, and after Congress—what?"

"Congress is a great arena," said the politician. "A man may do mighty things there."

"And supposing the mighty things done," said Paul, smiling, "what then? You will run for governor, of course?"

"Well, I suppose so."

"And then, the presidential chair itself! Eh?"

"It would take an army of missionaries and a campaign of twenty years to put any Catholic there," said Florian with a deep and heartfelt sigh.

"So there is a limit to your ambition," said Paul, with sarcastic good humor. "You are not an abyss for earthly honors to fall into when the governorship can fill your desires. Ah! Florian, I have found your weakness. You may be great, you will not be the Napoleon of your profession. You will never change your religion to suit the demands of the world."

"Sometimes I wish I could," said Florian, and was sorry the next moment for his hastiness. Paul took it as a jest, however.

"That's natural," said he, "and here we are at home."

The politician was decidedly weary after his effort of that evening, and a feeling of utter dejection had been stealing over him. He threw himself in his chair and gave himself up to dozing and thinking. Always on these occasions his mind went back to the noble river of his boyhood; for straight before him, and the tears filled his eyes as he looked, was that solitary reminder of all that was so dear to him—Linda, as in her best and brightest days, waving her love to him and quiet Ruth dreaming.

Paul was right in judging that Florian's hopes still centered on the girl whose picture hung over the book-case. Politics and the women he had met were as yet unable to disturb the gentle way of her who for truth's sake had put aside her love for him, and, though in error as to her creed, was not one whit less devoted to principle than he, a Catholic, sharing in the possession of

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all truth. Sometimes the thought intruded on him that it would have been well to have dropped that condition of their love, and to have married her first and converted her afterwards; but, apart from its unfairness to her, he had laid down the principle that mixed marriages were hurtful, and he would not—what? Suppose now that there was an opportunity of renewing their former relations, and Ruth was yet obstinate in her belief, would he not be unwise to lose—what? Florian saw that he was stumbling against the rocks of conscience, and looked up at those sweet faces in the yacht, while the tears came into his eyes and his heart gave a great throb of pain. One was dead—O, Linda—and the other was worse than dead to him unless—what?

He sat a long time and thought no more. He was afraid to give utterance to his wishes, only it seemed to him that he was marching along in a dreadful solitude, and multitudes were shouting praises to him and calling him king, and crowns fell on his head, and at his feet lay the kingdoms of the world and the glories of them; but always he was alone with the sad, overpowering consciousness that Linda was dead and Ruth separated from him by interminable distances, yet always in view with her mournful face turned upon him. He must tramp that way alone, unless—He did not like to speak of that condition. Disgusted with himself and weary he took down two volumes which a literary friend had sent him to read. The authors were strange and new to him, although their names had been faintly echoed through the American literary world. One was a poet, the other a philosopher, and he was soon interested in the contents of the books.

CHAPTER XV.

Florian's relations with Ruth, he had to admit, were not of the most hopeful kind. In two years he had not exchanged words or letters with her, and from the various reports which acquaintances from Clayburg incidentally gave him he could see that she had settled down to the new life with her usual good sense and determination to forget the past. It appeared, too, that she had become literary in her tastes, and was a welcome contributor to many publications. As far as his hopes were concerned they seemed ridiculous, yet absence might have done considerable for him. He knew she once held him dearer than herself, and Ruth was not quick to forget. If he had kept her sweet image in his heart through all the blandishments of metropolitan society, through all the turmoil of political life and the hard study of his profession, was it not more likely that in the noble solitude of the north, amid scenes the more dear because he had once lived amongst them, with Linda's grave on the hillside to remind her of the dear child's fondest wishes, his image would fade more slowly from her mind and the old love die harder in her heart? Perhaps she was entertaining the same hopes that shared her loneliness, and the quiet study and prayer of those years of separation might have led her so near to the fold that to marry her would bring her safely in. On the other hand, he remembered, with a sigh, Ruth's rigid conscientiousness, which would make it a duty to dismiss every thought of him from her mind until time would allow her to look upon him merely as a friend. She had no claim on him, and that was enough. The dead heart of Linda would not beat more coldly than hers when they met again if this last supposition was correct, and yet he prayed Linda's prayer the more fervently as all these fierce doubts crowded on him, "that we may meet again."

At all events, Florian was beginning to feel that to marry was becoming for him a political necessity.

His popularity was increasing, too rapidly with the mob to be other than dangerous for one whose youth, want of wealth and social standing were embarrassing. He did not yet know his own leaders well, and his slowly-extending influence was but imperfectly recognized by them. He did not wish to advance too rapidly. He had no desire to walk to power over the heads of older, wealthier, and envious men, whose power might be used to crush him at the start. His aim was to become a weight, an authority, a support to the party and its representatives, and to disclaim any wish for office until the force of circumstances, the fitness of things, would place a position in his grasp. In the meantime the work of his profession would take up most of his time; he could gather in his shekels for political needs, select and strengthen his friends and supporters, and by his social qualities make and secure the acquaintance of the great of every field.

But social prominence, he thought, required an immediate and advantageous marriage. He cared very little for wealth, and his bride need have for her dower no more than the graces which make a woman popular—beauty, fine carriage, a mind above the average, and respectable birth. Ruth had all these and what a joy to him if his ambition could follow whither his heart led! But if not, what was he to do? There were other women in the world with some of the necessary qualifications, and Frances Lynch was one of them. Her mother had been a noted belle in her time, and enjoyed the friendship of remarkable men and women. A De Ponsonby keeping a boarding house was a little irregular, but such a boarding house. Only the most extraordinary lights of society and intellect gained admittance within its portals; and madame, although guilty of a blunder in marrying an Irishman with some brains, good birth and moderate fortune, never lost her power in the world of society on that account. Frances inherited her mother's wit and beauty. Now that she appeared to him in the light of a possible wife, he began to perceive that she had made a deep impression on him. She was slight and willowy in form, with a woman's full height and quiet grace of manner. He remembered how transparent her face was, and how delicate its outline; how the sunlight gleamed through her yellow hair; the sweetness of her voice; the beauty of her mouth, teeth and smile; the gentleness and womanliness of her disposition, and her winning and candid ways. He had to admit that beside her Ruth seemed quite plain. And, moreover, Frances was a Catholic and very devout, to all appearances. What her faults were he did not know, as he never looked for them. It seemed a little odd, even to his present changed conditions of thought, that before the old hopes died he should thus be looking for an object on which to found new ones, but it was an old trick with his calculating nature, which political habits had intensified. He went off on the spur of the moment to look for her, and study her a little more closely. It was early yet, and she had returned from Mass and was reading in the common sitting-room alone. Her plain-colored walking dress contrasted very well with the light colors of the room, her light hair and pale face. She looked up with a grave smile of recognition as he entered.

(To be Continued.)

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