

[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

## BLIGHTED LIVES.

BY EDGAR FAWCETT.

He said: Since fate has willed it so  
I must bear all until the last;  
Yes, even till death shall lay me low,  
I must endure my part!  
It may be, other joys will make  
Vague semblance of the joy I knew,  
That in the wide world I shall take  
My part, and play it through.  
But no fresh greenery can gleam  
On ruined bough and blasted bole,  
And never shall the sweet lost dream  
Revisit my sad soul!

(He spoke: And the changeful seasons went  
And the changeful seasons came,  
Bringing the calmness of great content,  
And a wife with money and name.)

She said: I am so faint and weak  
In spirit, that I may not go  
Much further through this dark and bleak  
Desolateness of woe!  
I shall sink, presently, and be  
Forgotten of the world's cold eye;  
Pray tell him of my grave, that he  
May mourn me where I lie!  
And tell him that his last caress  
Was thought of with my dying breath:  
Ah, speak not of forgetfulness—  
You know that mine means death!

(She spoke: And the seasons came and went,  
With changes dreary or fair,  
And now, in the calmness of great content,  
She is wife to a millionaire.)

WHO PAINTED THE GREAT MURILLO  
DE LA MERCED?

(From Blackwood's Magazine.)

## CHAPTER II.—Continued

"He is the prince of ciceroni," Conway explained to me; "he is the only southern Italian I ever knew that can hold his tongue—that cuts his story short when you have had enough of it, tells you only what you want to know, and knows it when you want him to tell it."

Pioneered by this accomplished individual, in the diminishing light of a southern evening, we started on our quest for the nameless princess. We were more reserved towards our cicerone Pinto than we had been to the waiter, directing him only to lead us to the Lavinaio nel Quartiere Mercato. Crossing the Piazza Castello and the Marinella, we plunged into a maze of ill-lighted narrow streets, walled in by lofty houses, lofty churches, and monastic buildings; the former of which, as we advanced further, became meaner in character, with signs of indigence,—within, seen through open windows and doors—without, marked by such accessories as dirty, half-naked children, and by more squalid-looking men and women. It was evidently one of the "slums" of Naples into which we had got; when, opposite a passage between the houses ascending to higher ground beyond, Pinto, who was preceding us, stopped and pointing at this entrance, to our profound mortification, exclaimed,—

"Eccola! rare ees it."

Brought up suddenly thus, Charters and I turned to each other in blank surprise. As we caught one another's looks, our disappointment seemed to strike us both from such a ludicrous point of view that, deep as my feelings really were, excited as I had become—perhaps owing to this excitement casually diverted, I know not—but I joined him in an explosion of laughter which vexed my soul, but only became the more obstreperous for the vexation. The idea of the exquisitely-refined and lovely being I had painted—a graceful, dignified princess, too—existing among the squalor of such a scene—it was too absurd! What could Stapfer mean by sending me to such a spot? It must be a lapse of memory—a mistake in mine! Whatever it was, I indicated to my companions the abandonment of all hope to find the object of my search in that locality, by returning at once, without remark or inquiry, the way we had come.

Arrived at our hotel, accompanied by Signor Pinto, I presently had occasion to appreciate the judgment with which Charters had selected him from all other ciceroni. He sat quite silent, though it was soon seen how observant, while we spoke hastily and despondingly of our disappointment. By the time we paused he seemed to have perfectly made out our purpose and difficulty.

"Ah ha! signori," he said, "you look-a fore some-a von-a? You no-a find-a he'em, you tell-a me—I find-a he'em, eef he be in Na'pli."

"Of course you will!" shouted Charters, enthusiastically; "you're just the fellow! I say tell him about the Princess—he knows lots of people that can help him. Only, dash it! you must make it worth his while—say a trifle for his time, and something handsome if he succeeds: you don't mind stumping up, eh? Is that your view of things, too, Signor Pinto?"

"Ya-es, ya-es, sare; per-hap-a I mose go-a many people, an' I mose stump-a too."

I assented with all my heart to the plan thus suddenly started; indeed no other even glimmered out of the deep obscurity of the subject. The terms for his assistance were soon arranged, infinitely to Signor Pinto's satisfaction. In return—and he undertook this with a confidence which astonished Charters and myself—he was to discover the Princess who sat to Stapfer ten years ago, and obtain her history—actually her parentage, birth, title, education, fortune, and all relating to her while she remained on Neapolitan territory; moreover, if she were still within its bounds, he was to carry me where I might see her, and assure myself that it was the veritable person to whom this information applied.

"I'll tell you what," Conway said when Pinto had left, "I'm blest if he isn't in the police! I never thought of it before. Every two out of three in Naples are spies upon the odd man—that's it!"

Pitting action against irksomeness of suspense, under Charters's guidance, I employed the next day in an excursion to Baia. On our return, late at night, we found Pinto at our hotel. There was a look of conscious success about him that at once raised in us the highest hopes, though, to both my simple and Charters's boisterous demands, he steadily refused information.

"Eef you have only a lee-tle bozzetto, you call-a a skitz-a, eet all do mosh-a help-a?"

"A sketch, eh? Will to-morrow morning do?—we are dead tired to-night."

"O ya-es, ya-es, ya-es! eet sall do ver well-a. I come-a to your-a brick-a-fast-a."

Our hopes sprang higher yet, when, next morning, we observed Pinto's eyes glisten and his thin lips curl into an assured smile, as he keenly regarded the sketch I had just made. Still he refused to utter a word for our satisfaction; yet there was something very significant in the way he addressed us on leaving.

"Perhap-a, signori, you go volk-a wis-a me in ze mornin' zu-morrow? Eef-a you-a stay here-a, I sall come-a in ze mornin'."

Conway smacked his hands together with a report like a pistol. "My mother was a frau, and my father a mynheer, if we arn't within a day and a half of a discovery now, eh?" he said.

I could not help agreeing with him, or else Pinto was deluding us with false hopes by false looks; as that, however, could in no way be worth his while, we determined to believe in next day.

That next day I sprang up, hopelessly wide awake, hours before my usual time, and I was usually an early riser. Thoughts, the combination of fear and expectation, seemed to sting rather than soothe me. I gave it up, after the first endeavour to swallow at breakfast. As little could I sit still, or bear companionship—even that of Charters. I felt as if I should choke within walls, and retired with my cigar to the balcony, where, for what appeared a double morning, I paced restlessly to and fro, to the intense amusement, I believe, of several heaps of idlers, who, from carefully-selected positions, speculated upon my actions to the confirmation of their previous general impressions, that "gl' Inglesi sono quasi tutti pazzi."

At last! A *cittadina* stops. Ha! it is Pinto. A moment after he is with us, and invites us to accompany him.

I suppose it is very foolish, but I can't help it. All my life long it has been the same with me: at any sudden excitement, or at its culmination, however prepared, my heart, after giving one wild bound, seems to stand still, and a deadly faintness ensues. All this occurred now. But Charters, prompt in all things, mastered the situation in a moment, by thrusting a liqueur-bottle, to its shoulders, into my mouth with one hand, and with the other dabbling me with iced water—which ran down inside my neckcloth—till I was gasping from two causes at once. I observed, while recovering, that he prudently put the *maraschino*-flask in his pocket.

Pinto did not follow us into the carriage, but took a seat upon the perch beside the driver, manifestly to elude the torrent of questions I, or certainly Conway, would have poured upon him. We drove at a fast pace for quite half an hour, when stopping at Mergellina, at the foot of Posilipo, Pinto descended, requested us to do so, and proposed,—

"You please-a volk-a a lee-tle-a vay wees me, a-a-ha, signori."

Resolutely shaking his head in silent reply to Charters's rapid interrogatories, he preceded us up a narrow lane, bordered on each side at intervals by wretched tumble-down patched-up houses—each, however, with a luxuriant garden. I refrain from describing my sensations while, as I believed, approaching the solution of the great mystery of my life, except, that wild astonishment at the possibility of finding it in such a neighbourhood rose high above all others. My heart beat so thickly that I had to pause twice during the ascent and avail myself of Conway's support, as well as of the prudential little item out of his pocket. We had gained a considerable elevation. The lane almost lost the character of one, and had become more like a half-marked path. The huts were more scattered, smaller, and meaner in appearance than those we had passed, and all the people whom we saw were of the *marnari* or *lazzaroni* class. Still, looking around on each side, and further, further on, nowhere was an indication of any such place as might enshrine my peerless lady visible. At the foot of a sharp pitch that arose in our front, above which on one side we could see the tiles of a hut, I was pausing again, breathless and in bewildered perplexity, and to cool my forehead in a tiny tunnel of water that here came singing down beside the bare track to which our path had dwindled; Pinto had not stopped, but, having climbed the hill, was pausing in an attitude of unmistakable, self-complacent, dignified triumph upon the summit, leaning one hand upon a broken wall, with the other gracefully posed upon his breast, his head erect and slightly averted—as if he were standing to have his picture painted.

"What can he mean?" both Charters and I exclaimed at once, rushing up to his side.

"Eccola!" he shouted, very coolly taking a pinch of snuff, facing round towards the hut, waving an arm in the air, and letting it fall in a straight line, pointing in the same direction—"Ecco la principessa!"

Leaning against a stony ridge, over which the little rill tumbled in a tiny cataract and rushed away in a hollow it had worn at the side of the path, there was before us, at a dozen yards from the track where we standing, a low cabin, with no upper storey, made of wood and clay, and with a few squared but irregular stones built in at the corners and in courses along the base of the walls; these last having projecting offsets thrust out from them at the sides, evidently to enlarge the room within as circumstances made further space necessary; the whole covered with broken tiles. A low wall, like a bank, of earth and stones, seemingly held together by the ivy that grew luxuriantly on both its sides, enclosed one margin of a grassy plot in front; the other being bounded by the rocky cliff against which the structure rested, and which was evidently part of an old quarry, whose excavation had left the level ground whereon the cabin stood. Approaching we had heard the merry laughter and shrill cries of children romping; and, contrasting those reckless noises, the voice of another child singing with lovely tones a melody like a cradle-song—slow and long drawn out, and sweet and soothing as the wash of a calm sea on its sands. But when we reached the side of Pinto, all had become hushed. The children—two sturdy little fellows of four and six, a small girl of three, another of eight or nine, singing to sleep a drowsy *bambino* lying on the moss of the bank at her side—awed at the sudden appearance of strangers, stopped, spell-struck, in the midst of their play, and gazed at us with wide-open eyes. Beyond, beside the door, in the shade of a rude trellised porch tendrilled with a vine, sat a female, her face turned from us, with busy fingers occupied in weaving a net. Her head and bosom were covered with the ordinary *fazzoletto*, and she wore only the short skirt of the women of Naples, which, as she sat, revealed the bare legs and naked feet. Strange!—neither the cessation of the children's noisy play, Pinto's loud exclamation, nor our presence, seemed to have aroused her attention; for still she continued to push and jerk her shuttle, and keep her head

averted, low over her work. While I stood looking and speechless—a good deal of indignation mixing with my astonishment—Signor Pinto maintained such an air of conceited complacency and self-laudation, opposed to my utter disappointment, that I felt much more inclination to kick him than to ask for an explanation. But as I advanced to resolve the faint shade of doubt that must necessarily have remained if the woman's face were unseen, the youngest child, perhaps alarmed at my approach, sprang to her and clutched her dress. The mother turned her head and gazed at me. One look into those wonderful, wistful eyes—yes, it is the Princess! Utterly forgetting in my agitation all things but that she was before me, I asked:

"Do you remember me?"

The wistful eyes caught the fact of my speaking, but turned from my face to that of her eldest child, who had come to her side. It was the young girl who, in her Neapolitan dialect, answered:

"Mammà non ci sente, e non parla."

Why should I not tell? I made a sign to Charters, and rushed away up the hill, till alone and unseen; then I wept, as men with loving hearts weep, when hope seems rudely parted from their lives for ever.

In the evening of that day I received from Pinto a neatly-written document, quite official in character. I append Charters's translation:—

(SERAFINA PAGANO)

"Born at the Piano Sorrento, 1805. Deaf and dumb. Left Sorrento, 1820. Lived subsequently in Naples, Florence, and Rome. Became a model for statues and painters, by whom she was known as 'La Principessa.' Married, 1823, Bartolomeo Starace, *marinaro*, in Naples. Domiciled in Naples since 1823. Of good character."

On the day but one after, by arrangement through Pinto, she came to our hotel, accompanied by her husband, a thick-set, bandy-legged, but exceedingly good-natured-looking fellow, and her eldest girl. The child was our medium of communication. How, by motion of hands and fingers and lips, and by gestures, she translated, almost as rapidly as uttered, our words into meanings; and how, in a similar manner, they were replied to by her mother and understood by her—was something so marvellous that I abstain from any attempt to describe what could only be credited by seeing.

"Yes, she remembered me now. She did not know the name nor the rank of the lady I had seen her with. She had been engaged at Florence by a 'milord,' through Signor Andreoli the statuary, to travel with him and 'miladi'; 'miladi' was the veiled personage I had seen. She was not always veiled—only in the studio. She did not know the reason, and had never thought about it. 'Milord' was *un galantuomo*, and fabulously rich. They had crossed the sea; but she did not know it was to England; had never before now heard of a place called London. I was the only artist to whom, during her engagement, she had sat. The dead head? It had not struck her as anything extraordinary; she knew nothing about it but that it was there. She remembered seeing from the window a funeral that left the house soon after her arrival; it had impressed her deeply by its difference in character from a funeral in her own country. Signor Andreoli was dead—he was dying when she left Florence. Nothing could exceed the kindness with which she had been treated, nor the generosity with which she had been remunerated. 'Miladi' herself had accompanied her back, not to Florence, but to Naples. It was her own wish to return to Naples, as they had made her rich enough to marry Bartolomeo. She had never seen them since."

That was all. Obligated to make use, so far, of Charters, I resolved to do more, and I confided to him the whole affair. This discovery of my beautiful model in "La Principessa" knocked its greatest element of romance out of my story; but it left what remained only the more difficult to analyse into motives and objects. What did it all mean? How we guessed and guessed! How we exasperated ourselves with wild surmises! knowing perfectly well all the time how utterly useless it all was.

"I tell you what, my fine fellow," said Conway to me, at the same time thrusting all his fingers up through his hair, "it won't do to have any more of this. Instead of being driven frantic, it will be a thousand times better to distract ourselves. I vote for San Carlo this evening; to-morrow we'll have Pinto here. Get upon quite another horse, and send this ten-year old mystery back to Old Nick, who must have been its breeder."

I could do no better than follow Conway's lead. So we went to San Carlo, and next day set to work—as Englishmen usually do—seriously to enjoy ourselves. In a fortnight we went back to Rome. A week later I returned to England, nearly oblivious of my pet mystery, anticipating no further revelations, or—if expectation lurked anywhere out of sight in my mind—certainly not dreaming that I should come upon them where and how I did, nor that they would prove such odd things as they ultimately turned out to be.

## CHAPTER III.

THAT arch of Time's bridge where you, reader, and I last parted was 1833; this, where we meet again, is numbered 1850. My waistcoats now, measured round from the bottom button, are twice as capacious as at the top. It is seventeen years since I was freed from one enchantment, and fifteen years since I fell victim to another. My wife's name is Helen—Nelly in affection, when she is amiable and I in a mode to appreciate it. My eldest boy is at Rugby; and I hope he will prove himself worthy of all I have spent and am about to spend on him. I mention these things, and, in addition, introduce the fact that there are six others, differing in gender, between him and baby—all pushing themselves up to that stand-point in life from whence, doubtless, they will assert similar claims—to show that there can be little of my early romance left in me: so little, in fact, that I believe I never once thought about that old pet adventure of mine from the time when, one evening, sitting beside my young wife, who was preparing for bed our little Charley—the Rugby boy now—and showing me how beautifully the cherub, supported under his armpits by her tender hands, could walk from her knee right up to her neck—I told her the whole story, my foolish feelings and all, upon the great principle that married folk should have no secrets—no, not in their hearts—from each other—till a little while ago, when the tide of concealment, which had remained at flood for twenty-seven years, ebbed suddenly away, and left my mystery stranded high and dry—