

GOLDEN THRONE.

[A ROMANCE BY SAMUEL P. PUTNAM.] of supreme pleasure. Do we not often sacrifice a personal convenience for the sake of the lower animals, a horse, a dog, or a worm even? There is a necessity in this. Do you ask me why? I cannot tell. I simply know that such is human nature. It is selfish, I grant; it is also unselfish. In this case, Lorena and I cannot choose our own happiness; we should not be happy in so doing, in the largest sense. We chose not to be happy, because, in so choosing we find the greatest joy. Why could we not? Because, in the terrible pain of it all, there is an unspeakable pleasure; that which is highest in us is thus, and thus only, satisfied. Lorena is her own judge; she recognizes the sacredness of her plighted faith; that is all in all to her. Her love is too pure to suffer the slightest stain. Her wish to me is law. We do not decide for others, and we do not blame those who seek to break an unendurable bond. We choose rather to suffer than that another should suffer. We recognize, also, that we belong to humanity, and must act for its highest welfare, and not for our own. I could not be happy in Lorena's love, if the life of Raymond were thereby crushed. If he were ignoble, if he were so unfitted to her as to make life a perpetual burden, then she would have a right to be free; but he is a dear and honorable man, and loves her dearly, to whom she has given a most sacred promise. The choice we make is inevitable from what we are, and that ends it.

"I do not expect to see her again. Am I miserable, therefore, because I thus surrender a great and beautiful joy? Is life empty? No; for, after all, the greatest joy of living is loving; and I can love, I can love. Oh, the wonder of it all! Daily to have her image in my heart, daily to think how noble, how pure, how sweet she is! I am in agony, indeed, but miserable I am not; for life is made great by this love. It is elevated, enlarged. To possess her and a thousand like her in my arms would not equal this infinite joy of loving. Even though I cannot touch her hand or lip, because I have seen and loved her, hereafter all my life is beautified. Though I carry an endless pain, yet in that pain is an endless greatness."

"How differently we are situated! I am happy in my love. It seems as if I could not lose it; for it is a part of my being, and beyond this sweet possession the universe is a blank. I only pity him who has never had a throb of love, whose life is entirely selfish. What does he know of the joy of living? He is entombed in a grave more dark than earth. The moment one begins to love, if only a dog, he begins to live. To love something

different from one's self,—a flower, a star, a human soul,—what power is in it, what a stir of all the faculties! Love is the magician's wand that shows the secret riches of the most barren spot. It is Aladdin's lamp that compels the finest ministries. How weak one is when he is selfish, how strong when he is loving! Love is indeed creative. It is continually producing, enlarging, sweeping into new forms and beauty and power. It assimilates all, and it achieves all."

The two friends separated,—the one to love possessed, the other to love unpossessed. Yet each life was crowned; for love is a crowning, whether it sits by our side and weaves a royal robe, or whether we simply behold its marvelous beauty on the inaccessible heights.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

It was a brilliant and fashionable audience listening to one of the world's renowned singers. All were intent, as the birdlike notes filled the air. Marvelously sweet they were, like diamond sparkles in the lofty height of song,—an exuberant fountain of melody, that rose higher and higher, and then burst in exquisite strains like flakes of fire. Wondrous music, voice of passion, of tragedy, and of hope,—how the heart flows upon its mellow tide, and what revealing pictures it creates!

The people were entranced; and loud plaudits filled the auditorium, and the gleaming flowers were borne to the stage. Again and again was the singer recalled. It was an hour of glorious triumph.

Once more, the song flowed rich and full, as if there were a heaven seeming to come fresh from its sparkling bosom.

"What can lift the human heart so high as this?" said Charlie. "To me, it is the very glory of human existence."

"Yet all this wonder of music comes from the pain and agony of life. Without tragedy, the deepest things cannot be touched. She is singing the wild love-song of Lucia, where the breaking heart breathes its awful woe. How terrible, yet how beautiful! Listen!"

The tones of the singer seemed freighted with the infinite suffering of the distracted lover. It breathed despair and unutterable horror; yet how perfect, how superb the harmony! True it is that sorrow is the mother of our greatest consolation; for only sorrow overwhelming like an ocean could create such magnificence of sound, sweeping and clashing, and then bending and bursting with expressive beauty. The voice of the singer vibrated with all the intensity of the situation, and from the depths of despair poured forth the most ecstatic concord.

"It is as if a flame were passing over me," said Blanche.

Softly the last notes trembled on

the air. The audience were as still as death, as if eager to hold the vanishing delight.

There came a sudden and terrible cry, "Fire!" and from the stage swept a column of smoke. Quick as lightning, Charlie had seized Blanche, and was already halfway to the door.

Will was so intent upon the play and rapt by the passionate music that voiced the deep pain of his own heart that he scarcely noticed the tumult. Afterward he saw the bursting flame. The surging crowd was before him, pushing and heaving in blind terror.

He said: "I might as well wait. Perhaps I may be of service."

That really seemed the only wise course. The crowd was simply furious. There was an end of restraint. It was mad endeavor in every direction, like the wild plunge of animals or waves in a hurricane. People were literally tossed upon one another, and dashed forward and back in the frightful struggle. The flames leaped forth more fiercely. They caught the curtains, and were soon beyond control. It was evident that the building would be destroyed, and the only chance of life was in the open air. They who remained must assuredly perish.

Will saw that he was hemmed in; and that he must take his chances to escape when the first fury was over. He was perfectly cool, and calmly awaited the opportunity of escape. There were a few who followed his example.

He did not think simply of himself. He cast his eyes around in search of those who might need the help of his strong arm.

In the midst of the surging crowd, he saw a woman bending over some one, who had apparently fainted. He soon forced himself to her side. When she turned, he cried,—

"Lorena!"

And she said tremulously,—

"Will—Mr. Burnham!"

"You must escape. Let me bear you to a place of safety. Now is the time."

"It cannot be!" she said. "I must save him."

She pointed to the body that lay at her feet. It was Raymond.

"Alas! we cannot save him," said Will. "It is all that we can do to save ourselves, and with our best efforts we may perish."

"I cannot leave him. It would be too cruel. Besides, what can I do? I might as well remain. If I attempt to escape, I shall fail."

"Not if you trust yourself to me. I can carry you forth. I can fight my way. Come!"

"I cannot. If you have power to save another besides yourself, you must save him, Raymond, my husband."

"This is too cruel. Save him and let you perish? I cannot do it.

If I am forced to choose, I must choose you. I would save both if I could; but I cannot. In dire extremity, my heart cries out for you."

"I know you cannot save us both. Then take him in your arms, and leave me."

"I revolt against this. It is my duty to save the one I love."

"It is your duty to obey the one you love."

"Not in such a case. I will obey my own conscience."

"It cannot be. I plead with you. I cannot leave him. If you will not take him, leave us both."

"The flames are almost on us. There is no time to dispute. I shall seize you, in spite of your resistance."

"No," she cried. "Attempt to seize me, and I will plunge into the flames! Can you not respect my feelings?"

"Why should you not feel for me as well as for him?"

"He is my husband. I should not leave him."

"But you command me to leave you."

"Because I must. Go, if you will; but I still believe that you are too noble to leave a fellow-creature to perish."

"I will help him, but first let me help you. I will plunge back into the building, and save him at all hazards."

"You must save him first. Then, if you can save me come."

"Oh, this is horrible!" cried Will. "Why do you insist? Why do you compel me to see you perish in the flames,—the woman that I love, my very life, my soul?"

"Is it not better that I should perish in the flames than do the least thing that might stain my soul? Because we love each other, let us be most noble, that we may be worthy of this heavenly gift. Because we love, let us sacrifice. Our love is so pure I would not have the least selfishness in it; and it would be selfish, would it not, to save ourselves?"

"If I could only save you, I would willingly perish myself."

"That is not enough; your love must be willing to sacrifice even me."

"Why, what commands it?"

"Honor! Oh, what is love without honor? Honor we must obey in all things. Honor demands that we save him, not ourselves. If I perish, I gladly perish. Save him, I beg of you, save him."

The flames hissed about them. The burning tongues almost touched them. The smoke began to roll in thick and heavy clouds above their heads.

"Lorena, I obey," said Will. "It is almost beyond the power of mortal heart, but I will save him. Then I will return, and if I cannot save you, I will be buried with you

(To be Continued.)