ADVENTURES OF AN AIDE-DE-CAMP, VOLUME I

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ADVENTURES
OF
AN AIDE-DE-CAMP:
OR,

A CAMPAIGN IN CALABRIA.

BY

JAMES GRANT, ESQ.
AUTHOR OF "THE ROMANCE OF WAR."

Claud. I look'd upon her with a soldier's eye,
That liked, but had a rougher task in hand
Than to drive liking to the name of love:
But now I am returned, and that war thoughts
Have left their places vacant; in their rooms
Come thronging soft and delicate desires,
All prompting me how fair young Hero is,
Saying how I liked her ere I went to war.
SHAKSPEARE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

The very favourable reception given by the Press and Public generally, to "The Romance of War," and its "Sequel," has encouraged the Author to resume his labours in another field.

Often as scenes of British valour and conquest have been described, the brief but brilliant campaign in the Calabrias (absorbed, and almost lost, amid the greater warlike operations in the Peninsula) has never, he believes, been touched upon: though a more romantic land for adventure and description cannot invite the pen of a novelist; more especially when the singular social and political ideas of those unruly provinces are remembered.

Indeed it is to be regretted that no narrative should have been published of Sir John Stuart's Neapolitan campaign. It was an expedition set on foot to drive the French from South Italy; and (but for the indecision which sometimes characterized the ministry of those days) that country might have become the scene of operations such as were carried on so successfully on the broader arena of the Spanish Peninsula.

Other campaigns and victories will succeed those of the great Duke, and the names of Vittoria and Waterloo will sound to future generations as those of Ramillies and Dettingen do to the present. Materials for martial stories will never be wanting: they are a branch of literature peculiarly British; and it is remarkable that, notwithstanding the love of peace, security and opulence, which appears to possess us now, the present age is one beyond all others fond of an exciting style of literature.

Military romances and narratives are the most stirring of all. There are no scenes so dashing, or so appalling, as those produced by a state of warfare, with its contingent woes and horrors; which excite the energies of both body and mind to the utmost pitch.

The author hopes, that, though containing less of war and more of love and romantic adventure than his former volumes, these now presented to the Reader will be found not the less acceptable on this account. They differ essentially from the novels usually termed military; most of the characters introduced being of another cast.

The last chapters are descriptive of the siege of Scylla; a passage of arms which, when the disparity of numbers between the beleaguered British and the besieging French is considered, must strike every reader as an affair of matchless bravery.

Several of the officers mentioned have attained high rank in their profession—others a grave on subsequent battle-fields: their names may be recognised by the military reader. Other characters belong to history.

The names of the famous brigand chiefs may be familiar to a few: especially Francatripa. He cost the French, under Massena, more lives than have been lost in the greatest pitched battle. All the attempts of Buonaparte to seduce him to his faction, or capture him by force, were fruitless; and at last, when his own followers revolted, and were about to deliver him up to the iron-hearted Prince of Essling, he had the address to escape into Sicily with all their treasure, the accumulated plunder of years. Being favoured by the Queen, he, no doubt, spent the close of his years in ease and opulence. Scarolla became a true patriot, and died "Chief of the Independents of Basilicata."

It is, perhaps, needless to observe, that many scenes purely fanciful are mingled with the real military details.

The story of the Countess of La Torre, however, is a fact: the shocking incidents narrated actually occurred in an Italian family of rank, many years ago. Strazzoldi's victim received no less than thirty-three wounds from his poniard. The author has given the real titles of the infamous parties, and only trusts he has not marred a very sad story by his mode of relating it. In atrocity, the tale has lately found a parallel in the Praslin tragedy: indeed, "truth is stranger than fiction." There is nothing so horrible in a romance but may be surpassed by the occurrences contained in the columns of a newspaper; where we often find recorded outrages against humanity, greater by far than any conceived by the wildest imaginings of a French novelist.

Those feudal militia, or gens-d'armes, the *sbirri*, so often mentioned in these pages, were a force maintained by the landholders. The sbirri received a certain sum daily to support themselves, and provide their arms, clothing, and horses: they lived among the paesani in the villages, but were completely under the orders and at the disposal of their lord. The sbirri were the last relics of the feudal system.

Since these volumes were written, the flames of civil war have passed over the romantic Calabrias: the government of Naples has received a severe, though perhaps wholesome, shock; and the brave Sicilians are wresting from their obstinate sovereign those beneficial concessions which he cannot safely withhold. A still greater crisis for Italy is, perhaps, impending: Lombardy is filled with the troops of Austria; and if the *absolute* policy of the veteran Metternich prevails, ere long those "millions of cannon-balls" (which were so lately ordered by his government) will be dealing death among the ranks of Italian patriots. Should that day ever arrive, surely the Hungarian, the Bohemian, and the brave Pole, will know the time has come to draw and to strike! The eyes of all Europe are at present turned upon the policy of Austria, and the fate of Italy; and should matters ever take the turn anticipated, the landing again of a British army on the Italian shores will prove a death-blow to the ambitious projects of the House of Hapsburg.

A long preface may be likened to a hard shell, which must be cracked ere one can arrive at the kernel. The Author has to ask pardon of his readers for trespassing so long on their patience; but he considered the foregoing explanations in some degree necessary, to illustrate the fortunes, mishaps, and adventures of the hero.

EDINBURGH, *February* 1848.

ADVENTURES
OF AN
AIDE-DE-CAMP.

CHAPTER I.
THE LANDING IN CALABRIA.

On the evening of the last day of June 1806, the transports which had brought our troops from Sicily anchored off the Italian coast, in the Bay of St. Eufemio, a little to the southward of a town of that name.

The British forces consisted of H. M. 27th, 58th, 78th, and 81st Regiments of the Line, the Provisional Light Infantry and Grenadier Battalions, the Corsican Rangers, Royal Sicilian Volunteers, and the Regiment of Sir Louis de Watteville, &c., the whole being commanded by Major-General Sir John Stuart, to whose personal staff I had the honour to be attached.

This small body of troops, which mustered in all only 4,795 rank and file, was destined by our ministry to support the Neapolitans, who in many places had taken up arms against the usurper, Joseph Buonaparte, and to assist in expelling from Italy the soldiers of his brother. Ferdinand, King of Naples, after being an abject vassal of Napoleon, had allowed a body of British and Russian soldiers to land on his territories without resistance. This expedition failed; he was deserted by the celebrated Cardinal Ruffo, who became a Buonapartist; and as the French emperor wanted a crown for his brother Joseph, he proclaimed that "the Neapolitan dynasty had ceased to reign"—that the race of Parma were no longer kings in Lower Italy—and in January 1806 his legions crossed the frontiers. The "lazzaroni king" fled instantly to Palermo; his spirited queen, Carolina (sister of the unfortunate Marie Antoinette), soon followed him; and the usurper, Joseph, after meeting with little or no resistance, was, in February, crowned king of Naples and Sicily, in the church of Sancto Januario, where Cardinal Ruffo of Scylla, performed solemn mass on the occasion. All Naples and its territories

submitted to him, save the brave mountaineers of the Calabrias, who remained continually in arms, and with whom we were destined to co-operate.

When our anchors plunged into the shining sea, it was about the close of a beautiful evening—the hour of Ave Maria—and the lingering light of the Ausonian sun, setting in all his cloudless splendour, shed a crimson glow over the long line of rocky coast, burnishing the bright waves rolling on the sandy beach, and the wooded mountains of Calabria, the abode of the fiercest banditti in the world.

The tricolor flaunted over the towers of St. Amanthea, a little town to the northward of the bay, commanded by a castle on a steep rock, well garrisoned by the enemy; and the smoke of their evening gun curled away from the dark and distant bastions, as the last vessel of our armament came to anchor. The whole fleet, swinging round with the strong current which runs through the Strait of Messina, lay one moment with their sterns to the land and the next to the sparkling sea, which pours through between these rock-bound coasts with the speed of a mill-race.

Italy lay before us: the land of the fabled Hesperia—the country of the "eternal city;" and I thought of her as she was once: of "majestic Rome," in all her power, her glory, and her military supremacy; when nations bowed their heads before her banners, and her eagles spread their wings over half a world. But, alas! we find it difficult to recognise in the effeminate Venetian, the revengeful Neapolitan, or the ferocious Calabrian, the descendants of those matchless soldiers, whose pride, valour, and ambition few since have equalled, and none have yet surpassed. We viewed with the deepest interest that classic shore, which so many of us now beheld for the first time. To me, it was a country teeming with classic recollections—the sunny and beautiful land whose very history has been said to resemble a romance; but the mass of our soldiers were of course, strangers to all these sentiments: the grave and stern Ross-shireman, and the brave bog-trotters of the Inniskilling, regarded it only as a land of hard marches, short rations, and broken heads; as a hostile coast, where the first soldiers of the continent were to be encountered and overcome—for with us these terms are synonymous.

Barbarized by the wars and ravages which followed the French revolution and invasion,—swarming with disorderly soldiers, savage brigands, and starving peasantry writhing under the feudal system—the Naples of that time was very different from the Naples of to-day, through which so many tourists travel with luxurious safety: at least so far as the capital. Few, I believe, penetrate into that terra incognita, the realm of the bandit Francatripa.

Orders were despatched by the general from ship to ship, that the troops should be held in readiness to disembark by dawn next day. The quarter-guards

and deck-watches were strengthened for the night, and strict orders given to sentries not to permit any communication with the shore, or with the numerous boats which paddled about among the fleet. Our ships were surrounded by craft of all shapes and sizes, filled with people from St. Eufemio, and other places adjacent: bright-eyed women, their dark hair braided beneath square linen headdresses, with here and there a solitary "gentiluómo," muffled in his cloak, and ample hat, beneath which glowed the red spark of a cigar; meagre and grizzled priests; wild-looking peasantry, half naked, or half covered with rough skins; and conspicuous above all, many fierce-looking fellows, wearing the picturesque Calabrian garb, of whose occupation we had little doubt: the gaiety of their attire, the long dagger gleaming in their sashes, the powder-horn, and the well-oiled rifle slung across the back by a broad leather sling, proclaimed them brigands; who came crowding among their honester countrymen, to hail and bid us welcome as allies and friends.

An hour before daylight, next morning, we were all on deck and under arms. Our orders were, to land with the utmost silence and expedition, in order to avoid annoyance from the light guns of the French; who occupied the whole province from sea to sea, and whom we fully expected to find on the alert to oppose our disembarkation.

My first care was to get my horse, Cartouche, into one of the boats of the *Amphion* frigate. Aware that sharp work was before us, I personally superintended his harnessing; having previously given him a mash with a dash of nitre in it, and had his fetlocks and hoofs well washed, and his eyes and nostrils sponged with vinegar, to freshen him up after the close confinement of the ship: he was then carefully slung over the side, by a "whip" from the yard-arm. The oars dipped noiselessly into the waves, and we glided away to the beach of St. Eufemio, the point marked out for our landing-place. I stood by Cartouche's head, holding the reins shortened in my hand, and stroking his neck to quiet him; for the fiery blood horse had shown so much impatience when the oars dipped into the water, or the boat heaved on the heavy ground-swell, that his hoofs threatened every instant to start a plank and swamp us.

All the boats of the fleet were now in requisition; and, being crowded to excess with soldiers accoutred with their knapsacks and arms, and freighted with baggage, cannon, and tumbrils, miners' tools, and military stores to arm and clothe the Calabrese, they were pulled but slowly towards the point of rendezvous. The last boat had no sooner landed its freight, than the ship of the admiral, Sir Sydney Smith, fired a gun, and the fleet of frigates and gunboats weighed anchor, and stood off northwards, to attack the Castle of St. Amanthea; against which, operations were forthwith commenced by the whole naval armament.

The lofty coast loomed darkly through a veil of haze; the morning air was

chill, and a cold sea-breeze swept over the black billows of the Straits; against the effects of which, I fortified myself with my comfortable, double-caped cloak, a cigar, and a mouthful from a certain convenient flask, which experience had taught me to carry always in my sabretache. The time was one of keen excitement; even to me, who had served at the siege of Valetta, and in other parts of the Mediterranean, and shared in many a memorable enterprise which has added to our empire the valuable posts and possessions we hold in that part of Europe. As the daylight increased, and the sun rose above the mountains, pouring a flood of lustre over the straits of the Faro, the scene appeared of surpassing beauty. Afar off, in the direction of the Lipari, the sea assumed its deepest tint of blue; while the whole Bay of St. Eufemio seemed filled with liquid gold, and the white waves, weltering round the base of each distant promontory, were dashed from the volcanic rocks in showers of sparkling silver: all the varied hues which ocean assumes under an Italian sky were seen in their gayest splendour. The picturesque aspect of this romantic shore was heightened by the appearance of our armament: as the debarking corps formed open column of companies on the bright yellow beach, their lively uniforms of scarlet, green, and white, the standards waving, and lines of burnished bayonets glistening in the sun—which seemed to impart a peculiarly joyous lustre to all it shone upon—the scene was spirit-stirring.

The white walls and church tower of the little town, the foliage of the surrounding forest, backed by the lofty peaks of the Calabrian Apennines—the winding strip of golden sand fringing the fertile coast, and encircling the wave-beaten rocks, where a fisherman sat mending his nets and singing, perhaps, of Thomas Aniello—the remote Sicilian shore, and the wide expanse of sea and sky were all glowing in one glorious blaze of light—the light of an Italian sunrise, beneath whose effulgence the face of nature beams bright with sparkling freshness and roseate beauty.

Our nine battalions of infantry now formed close column; while the Royal Artillery, under Major Lemoine, got their eleven field-pieces and two howitzers into service order, the tumbrils hooked to the guns, and the horses traced to the carriages. During these preparations the general kept me galloping about between the different commanding officers with additional instructions and orders; for we expected to be attacked every moment by the enemy, of whose arrangements we had received a very confused account from the peasantry.

As the sun was now up, the rare beauty of the country was displayed to the utmost advantage: but we scanned the lofty mountains, the romantic gorges, the grim volcanic cliffs and bosky thickets, only to watch for the glitter of French steel; for the flutter of those standards unfurled so victoriously at Arcole, Lodi, and Rivoli; or for the puff of white smoke which announces the discharge of a

distant field-piece. Strange to say, not the slightest opposition was made to our landing; although there were many commanding points from which a few light guns would have mauled our boats and battalions severely.

The troops remained quietly in close column at quarter distance, with their arms ordered, until command was given to unfurl all colours, and examine flints and priming. A reconnoitring party was then pushed forward to "feel the ground," and our little army got into marching order, and advanced to discover what the distance of a few miles would bring forth. The Corsican Rangers were the skirmishers.

"Sir John," said I, cantering up to the general, "permit me to join the light troops that I may see what goes on in front?"

"You may go, Dundas," he replied; "but remember, they are under the command of Major Kraünz, who, I believe, is no friend of yours."

"No, truly; there is no man I would like better to see knocked on the head; and so, *allons!* Sir John."

"Be attentive to his orders, however," said he, with a grave nod, as I bowed and dashed off.

Kraünz! yes, I had good reason to hate the name, and curse its owner. I had a brother who belonged to a battalion of these Rangers. He was a brave fellow, Frank; and had served with distinction at Malta, and under Charles Stewart at the siege of Calvi; and, after Sir John Moore, was the first man over the wall at the storming of the Mozello fort. But his career was a short one. Between Frank and Kraünz there arose a dispute, a petty jealousy about some pretty girl at Palermo; a challenge ensued, and Frank was put under arrest for insubordination. From that moment, he was a marked man by the brutal German, who was resolutely bent upon his ruin—and a military man alone can know what the unhappy officer endures, who is at strife with an uncompromising, vindictive, and perhaps vulgar, commanding-officer. Thank God! there are few such in our service. Frank's proud spirit could ill brook the slights and insults to which Kraünz subjected him; and being one day "rowed" publicly for coming five minutes late to parade, in the height of his exasperation he struck down the German with the sword he was lowering in salute, and was, in consequence, placed instantly under close arrest. A court-martial dismissed him from that service in which he had gained so many scars. His heart was broken: the disgrace stung him to the soul. He disappeared from Sicily, and from the hour he left his regiment could never be discovered by our family. Therefore, it cannot be wondered at that I cared but little about the safety of his German enemy.

The advanced party, under the command of Kraünz, consisted of three companies of Corsican Rangers; these moved in double quick time along the narrow highway towards the mountains, from which the hardy peasantry soon came

pouring down, greeting us with cries of "Long live Ferdinand of Bourbon! long live our holy faith!" I galloped after the Corsicans, in high spirits at the prospect of seeing something more exciting than was usually afforded by the lounging life I had spent in the garrisons of Sicily—dangling about the royal palace, or the quarter-general, drinking deep and late in our mess-room at Syracuse, or smoking cigars among the promenaders on the Marina of "Palermo the Happy." My brave Cartouche appeared to rejoice that he trod once more on firm earth; curveting, neighing, and tossing his proud head and flowing mane, while he snuffed the pure breeze from the green hills with dilated and quivering nostrils.

It was a soft and balmy morning: the vast blue vault above was free from the faintest fleece of cloud, and pervaded by the deep cerulean hue so peculiar to this enchanting climate. At that early hour, not a sound stirred the stillness of the pure atmosphere, save the twittering of the merry birds as they fluttered from spray to spray, or the measured tramp of feet and clanking of accoutrements, as the smart light troops in their green uniform moved rapidly forward—the glazed tops of their caps, their tin canteens and bright muskets barrels, flashing in the light of the morning sun.

As we advanced into the open country, the scenery rapidly changed: the sandy beach, the bold promontory, and sea-beaten rock, gave place to the vine-clad cottage and the wooded hill. Some antique tomb, a rustic fountain, or a time-worn cross, half sunk in earth, often adorned the way-side; the white walls of a convent, embosomed among luxuriant orange trees, or an ancient oratory, with its carved pilasters and gray arches, occasionally met the eye; while the dark arcades of a vast and ruined aqueduct stretched across the valley, and the ramparts of a feudal castello frowned from the mountains above—the ruddy hue of its time-worn brick, or ferruginous rock, harmoniously contrasting with the bronzed foliage of dense forests, forming the background of the view. The air was redolent with the perfume of roses, and myriads of other flowers, which flourished in the wildest luxuriance on every side; while the gigantic laurel, the vine, with its purple fruitage, the graceful acacia, and the glossy ilex, alternately cast their shadows across our line of march.

All this was delightful enough, no doubt: but a rattling volley of musketry, which flashed upon us from amid the dark masses of a wood we were approaching, brought a dozen of our party to the ground, and the whole to a sudden halt.

"Live Joseph, King of Naples!" cried the French commanding officer, brandishing his sabre. "Another volley, my braves!"

But before his last order could be obeyed, our own fire was poured upon his light troops, whose pale green uniform could scarcely be distinguished from the foliage, among which they had concealed themselves in such a manner as completely to enfilade the highway. Shot dead by the first fire, Kraünz rolled from

his saddle beneath the hoofs of my horse, and his glazing eyes glared upwards on me for a second. Perhaps I answered by a scowl: for I thought of my brother Frank.

Disconcerted by his sudden fall, and staggered by the unexpected fire in front and flank, the Corsicans would have shown the white feather—in other words, fled—had I not set a proper example to their officers, by leaping from Cartouche and putting myself at their head.

"Forward, Corsicans! Remember Paolo! Follow me! Charge!" And with levelled bayonets they plunged through the thicket, regardless of what the enemy's strength might be.

Hand to hand with the musket and sabre, we dashed headlong into the wood, and engaged the tirailleurs, with whom the contest was sharp. We lost several men, and I received a slight wound on the left arm from a young sub, whom we afterwards discovered to be the son of General Regnier; but a party of our own troops, led by Colonel Oswald, rushing with impetuosity on the flanks of the French, decided the issue of this our first encounter with them in Italy. We dislodged the little band from ambush, taking two hundred prisoners, and killing, or putting to flight, as many more. Captain De Viontessancourt, who commanded them, escaped with the survivors. These French troops proved to be a detachment of the 23rd Light Infantry.

Leaving a party to guard our prisoners, we followed cautiously the retreating tirailleurs through the great forest of St. Eufemio, and along the highway towards Maida, exchanging a skirmishing fire the whole way: many men were killed, or severely wounded, and left to become a prey to lynxes and wolves. As little honour and no advantage seemed likely to accrue from this unpleasant work, Oswald ordered a halt to be sounded, and drew the skirmishers together, until our main body appeared; when, by command of the general, a position was taken up on advantageous ground, supplied with wood and water, while the necessary advanced picquets were despatched to the different points and roads around it.

Here we formed an entrenched camp, expecting to be joined by some of the Calabrian noblesse and people, and to hear certain intelligence of the movements of the enemy whose strongest force lay at Reggio, under the command of Regnier, a general of division.

CHAPTER II.

THE PIGTAIL.

Soon after halting, we received intelligence of the successful issue of Sir Sydney Smith's attack on the Castle of St. Amanthea; a strong fort, which, being quite inaccessible on the land side, he carried by assault on the seaward, capturing four hundred prisoners, and a quantity of arms and military stores.

In the evening, I was despatched by Sir John to a young Neapolitan noble; who, in anticipation of our expedition had some time before secretly quitted Palermo, and had been residing among his countrymen, for the purpose of ascertaining their sentiments towards the British as allies, and the probable number that would rise in arms, on our displaying the Union-Jack in Italy.

This personage, to whom I took a letter from the general, bore the titles of Visconte di Santugo, and Grand Bailiff of Lower Calabria, and was the most powerful Feudatory in the provinces. Our leader requested that he would use all his influence to arouse the peasantry to arms, for the service of his Majesty the King of Naples, in support of whose cause our expedition had now landed on the Italian shore. We soon found, however, that the hardy Calabrese required no other incentive than their own intense hatred and deep-rooted detestation of the French. I had been ordered to return next morning with any volunteers the Visconte could collect; and was not averse from the prospect of remaining a night at his villa, as my undressed wound was becoming a little troublesome.

At that time, the two Calabrias, the Abruzzi, and all the Italian mountains and fastnesses, were swarming with hordes of armed peasantry—half patriots and half bandits. This system of disorganization and immorality was promoted by a mortal hatred—the rancorous enmity of Italian hearts—against the usurper Buonaparte, and his slavish law of conscription; which aimed at the military enrolment of all classes, without distinction or permitting substitution. The proud noble who could trace his name and blood to the warriors and senators of ancient Rome, and the humble peasant were to be alike torn from their homes, turned into the ranks as private soldiers, and sent forth, at the pleasure of this foreign tyrant, to fight and to perish among the wild sierras of Spain, or the frozen deserts of Russia. In consequence of this invasion of the rights of the Italian people, many young men of high birth, and others whose condition in life had, previous to the French aggression, been respectable, now fled to the mountains and wilderness, and became outlaws, rather than yield submission to the yoke of a Corsican conqueror. Ranged under various leaders, these spirited desperadoes, in conjunction with the banditti and the Loyal Masse, harassed the French incessantly, by a guerilla warfare of attacks, skirmishes, and assassinations; and with such effect, that Buonaparte computed his loss by the stiletto and rifle at not less

than twenty thousand soldiers, during his attempts to subdue the brave outlaws of the Calabrian mountains.

In every town there was a French garrison, and every garrison had its prison-house, which was filled with those whom the French chose to designate rebels: these they put to death by scores; waging against the unhappy paesani a war of extermination, and maintaining it with a cruelty unworthy of the heroes of Arcole and Marengo, and the representatives of the boasted "first nation in Europe." By sentence of a drum-head court-martial, and more often without the form of a trial, the poor peasants were shot to death in vast numbers; and their bodies, after being suspended on gibbets for a day or two, were cast into an immense pit dug close by, in order that the gallows might be clear for the next detachment of victims brought in by the troops employed in scouring and riding down the country. These outrages considered, it was no matter of wonder to us that the country rose *en masse* on our landing, and that the Neapolitan cry of "Ferdinando nostro, e la Santa Fede!" rang from the shores of the Mediterranean to the waves of the Adriatic.

As I rode from the camp on my solitary mission towards St. Eufemio, I thought of the lawless state of the country, and could not but feel a little anxious about my personal safety: the gay trappings of a staff uniform were likely to excite the cupidity of some villanous bandit, or unscrupulous patriot. What scattered parties of the French might be lurking in the great forest I knew not; but an encounter with them seemed preferable to one with the Calabrian brigands: of whose atrocious ferocity I had heard so many horrible stories circulated by the gossiping Sicilians, in the gardens and cafés, the salons and promenades, of Palermo. My first adventure gave me a vivid, but rather unpleasant, illustration of the fierce manners and unsettled state of the country we had come to free from invaders.

While crossing a rustic bridge, the parapets on each side of which were garnished with an iron cage, containing a human head in a ghastly state of decay, my ears were shocked, as my eyes had been, by the cries and exclamations of a man in great agony and terror. Quickening the speed of Cartouche from a trot to a gallop, and unbuttoning my holster flaps in readiness for drawing my pistols, I rode towards the place whence these outcries proceeded. In a rocky hollow by the wayside, I beheld a Sicilian struggling desperately with about twenty armed ruffians, whom I had no hesitation in believing to be banditti. They were all handsome and athletic men, in whose appearance there was something at once striking, picturesque, and sufficiently alarming. All wore high, conical, Calabrian hats, encircled by a broad, red riband, that streamed over the right shoulder; jackets and breeches of bright coloured stuffs, ornamented with a profusion of tags, tassels, and knots, and girt round the waist with a scarlet sash of Palmi silk; and

leathern gaiters, laced saltire-wise up the legs with red straps: a musket, dagger, and powder-horn completed their equipments. Coal black hair streamed in extravagant profusion over their shoulders; long locks being esteemed in the Calabrias a sign of loyalty to the king and enmity to the French: thus the extent of a man's patriotism was determined by the length of his hair. But the unfortunate Sicilian in their hands was destitute alike of flowing curls and twisted pig-tail; hence his captors, supposing him unquestionably to be a traitor (or at least not a true subject to King Ferdinand) in having conformed to the fashion of the French, were determined to punish him in the mode which the wild spirits of these lawless provinces adopted towards those who fell into their hands with hair shorn short: the head having become, since the commencement of the war, "the political index by which they judged whether men were Jacobins, Bourbonists," or Buonapartists.

The brigands greeted my approach with a shout of welcome, and while I was deliberating how best to interfere and save from their fury the unhappy man, he called upon me piteously for aid; saying that he "was a poor tanner of Palermo—a follower of our camp—and one who knew nothing of the fashions of Calabria!" But I was too late to yield him the least assistance, for the horrible punishment was inflicted the moment I drew bridle: and, in truth, I did not feel very chivalric in his cause, on learning that he was one of the villanous tanners of Palermo—that community of assassins so terrible to all Sicily.

The right hand of the poor wretch was chopped off with a bill-hook, and thrust bleeding into his mouth, which they compelled him to open by pressing the hilt of a poniard behind his right ear. A sheep's tail was then fastened to the back of his head, to supply the deficiency of hair; and bidding him wear it in remembrance of Francatripa, the whole party, after kicking him soundly, bade me 'good-evening,' and vanished among the rocks. The mutilated tanner lay on the ground, writhing in agony of body and bitterness of spirit, calling on San Marco the glorious, Santa Rosalia of Sicily, San Zeno, the blessed Madonna of Philerma, and innumerable other saints, to ease him of his pain; but as none of these spiritual potentates seemed disposed to assist him, he then applied to mortal me.

Dismounting, I raised him from the ground, and tearing my handkerchief into bandages, bound up the stump of his arm to staunch the blood; he bemoaning his misfortune in piteous terms. He had a wife and children, he said, who must perish now, unless the Conciarotti (tanners) of Palermo—to whose unruly corporation he belonged—would support them.

"Oh! Excellenza," he added, "believe me, I am no traitor: and surely the want of my hair will not make me one. I fell in with a French patrol, who compelled me to cut off my long hair, in token of submission to King Peppo." (Peppo,

a contraction of Giuseppe, or Joseph, was the name by which Joseph Buonaparte was commonly known.) "Maledictions drive them from purgatory to the deepest dens of hell! They have destroyed me—curses upon them! May they all hang as high as Tourloni the cardinal, and may their bones bleach white in the rain and the sunshine! Had I lost the left hand, instead of the right, I could still have revenged myself. Maledetto! Oh! blood for blood! Am I not one of the Conciarotti, at whose name the king quakes, at Naples, and his viceroy, at Palermo? But, oh! Madonna mia, never can revenge be mine; for the hand that is gone can grasp the acciaro no more!" And thus cursing and lamenting, he rolled on the grass till he foamed at the mouth. I was obliged to leave him, and pursue my journey.

By the road-side, I passed some of the bodies of those who had fallen in the skirmish of the morning. Stripped by the peasantry, they had lain all day sweltering under a burning sun; and now the vultures were screaming and flapping their wings, as they settled in flocks wherever one of these poor fellows lay unburied, with his blackened and gory wounds exposed to the gaze of every passer-by.

At the gate of St. Eufemio, I told several persons who were lounging and smoking under the shadow of the walls, of the condition in which I had left the tanner among the rocks; but instead of going immediately to his assistance, they only cursed him as a traitorous Sicilian.

"He is some false follower of Joseph the Corsican—cospetto! Let him die!—yes, die like a dog!" was the answer I received on all sides.

On entering the town, I was greeted by the shouts of the people, who had donned the red cockade of the Neapolitan king. Gentlemen bowed, and ladies smiled and waved their handkerchiefs from verandahs and sun-shaded windows; women held their children aloft at arms' length, and the ragged artisan flourished his broad straw hat over the half door of his shop; all joining in the general burst of welcome, and cries of long life to King Giorgio of Great Britain.

While riding through the principal street, with all the hurry and importance of an aide-de-camp bearing the fate of empires and of armies in his sabretache, I could behold on every hand the traces of that dreadful earthquake which, two hundred years before, had overwhelmed the ancient and once-opulent city, converting it in a moment into a vast fetid marsh. Here and there stood a palace, rearing its time-worn facade amid the miserable houses or filthy hovels of which the modern St. Eufemio is principally composed; while fragments of columns, crumbling capitals, and shattered entablatures still lay strewn on every side.

The mansion of the podesta, or mayor, and of Ser Villani, the principal lawyer, as well as others of a better description, bore marks of French violence and rapine. Torn from its foundations, lay a column with the arms of Luigi d'Alfieri, the grand bailiff, carved upon it; here lay a statue, there a fountain broken to pieces; the madonnas at the street corners were all demolished, the niches

empty, the lamps gone; and many gaps appeared on each side of the way, where houses had been pulled down for firewood, or wantonly burned by the brigade of the Marchese di Monteleone—a Buonapartist commander, whom common report declared to be an Englishman. All the stately trees that once bordered the Marina, or promenade, along the sea-shore, had been cut away and destroyed; probably, less from necessity than for the purpose of annoying the people: for the French, if allowed to be the most gallant nation, are also considered the most reckless soldiers in Europe.

CHAPTER III.

VISCONTE DI SANTUGO.

The villa of the Visconte di Santugo was some distance beyond St. Eufemio, and my way towards it lay along the desolate Marina.

The appearance of the bay, studded with our fleet of transports and men-of-war, was beautiful; its deep blue was now fast changing to bright gold and crimson, in the deep ruddy glow of the setting sun. The calm sea shone like a vast polished mirror; in whose bright surface the rocky headlands and the yellow beach, the picturesque little town of St. Eufemio, and the castles on the cliffs, with the little groups of white cottages that nestled under their battlements as if for protection, and the stately frigates, with their yards squared, and open ports bristling with cannon, were all reflected: every form and tint as vividly defined below the surface as above.

Situated upon the margin of the bay, stood the residence of the Grand Bailiff. It was a large and imposing edifice, and, though not a perfect model of architecture, presented a very fair example of the ancient Roman blended with the modern Italian style. Designed by the old architect, Giacomo della Porta, the villa occupied the site of the ancient castle of St. Hugo; which had withstood many a fierce assault during the wars with the Norman kings of Sicily, the Saracens and other invaders: it had also been the scene of a cruel act of bloodshed, during the revolt of Campanella the Dominican. The castle suffered so much from the earthquake of 1560, that the then Visconte demolished the ruins, and engrafted upon them the more modern Italian villa, which I was now approaching. A large round-tower of dark red brick-work, with ponderous crenelated battlements, reared its time-worn front above the erection of the sixteenth century. It

was a fragment of the ancient Castello di Santugo, and its superstructure rose on the foundations of a Grecian, Roman, or Gothic fortress, of unknown name and antiquity. From its summit the standard of Naples waved heavily in the light evening wind.

A rustic lodge and gate gave entrance to an avenue, that wound with snake-like turnings through the verdant grounds, embosomed among groves of orange and olive trees. Above these rose the old tower and the modern minarets with gilded vanes; while the heavy balustraded terraces and projecting cornices of the villa were seen at intervals, standing forward in bold relief or sunk in deep shadow, as the evening sun, now sinking into the Mediterranean, shed bright gleams of gold and purple upon its broken masses. A part of the edifice projected from the rocks, and supported upon arches, overhung the sea. The chambers in that damp quarter of the mansion were fitted up in the style of marine grottos; with mosaic-work, shells, marble, and many-coloured crystals, interspersed with fountains, where groups of water-gods spouted forth ample streams from conches and horns of bronze. These grottos afford a cool and silent retreat during the heat of the day, and a magnificent scene for an entertainment, or a ball *al fresco*, when illuminated by night.

The avenue, which was bordered on each side by statues of heathen deities, antique marble vases filled with flowers, and carved fragments of ancient temples, led to the portico; where a range of lofty Corinthian columns supported a pediment, ornamented with the arms of the noble house of Alfieri, collared with three orders of Italian knighthood.

On the smooth lawn in front, a group of girls—probably the servants of the mansion—danced to the tinkling notes of the mandolin, the sound of the tabor, and their own musical voices. The picturesque garb, and stately Ausonian forms of these "deep-bosomed maids," with their jetty tresses, and sparkling eyes, lent additional charms to a scene which, to me, was equally new and interesting. A few young men, in the Calabrian costume, were of the party; and I was not less pleased with their regular and manly features, agile air, and classic elegance of form, than with the softer graces of their bright-eyed companions. On my approach, they abandoned their amusement, and retired with something very like precipitation: a red coat was new to the Calabrians; with whom the appearance of a soldier was always associated with the rapine and violence of French foraging parties.

The chasseur, or courier—that indispensable appendage to a great continental household—approached me, bowing obsequiously, with cocked hat in hand. He was an old, iron-visaged and white-mustachioed Albanian Greek, descended from the followers of Scanderbeg; thousands of whose posterity are yet to be found in the Calabrias. The courier rejoiced in the classic name of Zacheo

Andronicus, and spoke an uncouth sort of Italian. His stern aspect, and splendid green livery, laced with gold and mounted with massive shoulder-knots; his heavy boots and spurs, scarlet sash, and couteau-de-chasse, or hanger, made him altogether a formidable-looking fellow; and enabled him to maintain his position as the attendant of the Visconte and the head of the numerous household. Bidding me welcome in the name of his lord, the courier desired a servant named Giacomo to take my horse to the stables in the wing. Giacomo—a spruce Italian, clad in a blue open-necked shirt, bright yellow-sleeved vest, and blue-striped breeches, girt about with a gorgeous scarlet sash, who acted in the capacity of sub major-domo—replied to the order of the Greek with a scowl, and desired another man to approach; to whom I resigned the bridle of Cartouche.

On entering the marble vestibule, I was met by the Visconte, who embraced me in the usual fashion; bestowing a kiss on my cheek with that theatrical air of friendship which is so truly continental, and surprises the more phlegmatic but warm-hearted Briton. However, having been pretty well used to such greetings while quartered in Sicily, I returned with a good grace the salutation of Santugo; whom I found to be a handsome young man about five-and-twenty (my own age), and of singularly noble aspect. His address was polished and captivating; the brilliancy of his large eyes gave a pleasing animation to his countenance, and lent a charm to his decided manner. His black mustachio, twisted on his upper lip, his short black hair (he was beyond the suspicion of Jacobinism), and closely buttoned sopraveste of dark-coloured velvet, gave him somewhat of a military air. When he spoke or laughed, he had more of the Calabrian mountaineer in his tone and expression, than of the oily condescension, and excessive politeness of the Italian noble; who, notwithstanding his many quarters and crests, and his boasted descent from the heroes of Rome and Magna Grecia, is too often a base and treacherous libertine—perhaps a coward.

What I took to be the jewelled pommel of a concealed poniard, sparkled at times beneath his vest (it was a time and country in which no unarmed man was safe); and suspended by a scarlet riband from a button-hole, the little star of a Sicilian order glittered on his breast. His shirt-collar, of the richest lace, was left negligently open, the evening being sultry; a short cloak, or mantello was thrown over his left arm, and a broad hat of light brown beaver, encircled by an embroidered riband, was held under his right: completing a costume which made his whole appearance sufficiently striking, when viewed in that lofty and magnificent vestibule; where the falling waters of a fountain, statues of the purest marble, and gilded cornices and pilasters, were gleaming in the rays of the setting sun, which streamed through four tall latticed windows.

Introducing myself as Lieutenant Claude Dundas, of his Britannic Majesty's 62nd Regiment, and Aide-de-camp to Sir John Stewart, I presented him with the

despatch, and added something to its import; observing how much we stood in need of immediate reinforcement from the Calabrian barons, in consequence of the smallness of our force.

"Signor, you have but anticipated me," said the Visconte. "The moment I heard of your disembarkation on the coast, I hoisted the Winged-Horse of Naples on the villa, and beat up for recruits. I have already mustered many, in addition to those peasantry over whom, as hereditary Feudatorio, I have distinct authority and power. These men served under me when the troops of Naples drove the French generals Championnet and Macdonald from Rome; and, from their courage and character, they will, I have no doubt, be a very acceptable aid to your general."

"Monsignore Luigi," I replied, bowing, "how can he sufficiently thank you?"

"By permitting me to take, as usual, the supreme command over them: in truth, Signor Claude, they will scarcely obey any one else. At their head, I have already seen some sharp service at Rome and in Apulia; where I fought in three pitched battles under the Cardinal Ruffo, when he was a loyal man, and true to Italy. In those days, how little could we have dreamed that the Cardinal Prince of Scylla, would become a traitor, and of such unhappy fame? I have fought well and hard for Italy," continued the Visconte, as we ascended the staircase, "and would still have continued in open hostility against Peppo the Corsican: but I left the army in disgust, at certain slighting expressions used towards me on a recent occasion, by his Majesty of Naples; who ought in person to lead on his people to death or victory, instead of eating his maccheroni at Palermo, like a coward as he is!"

"Harsh words, my lord!"

"Not more harsh than true. Know, Signor, that the high spirit of Carolina alone keeps the cause of liberty alive in the hearts of the Neapolitan people. Oh! for a hero to raise the house of Parma to its ancient fame! But we will talk of these matters over a glass of the ruby-coloured Capri Rosso. Be it remembered, Signor," continued the young lord, as he led me through a suite of noble apartments, "that zealous as I am in the service of my country and its unhappy royal family, it is not without considerable dread that I draw off the sbirri from my territory, in the present state of Calabria. Divided by politics and old family grudges, our Feudatories are all at enmity, and quarrels exist here among these wild mountains, which are altogether unknown to northern Italy. Up the Valley of the Amato, some miles from this, there dwells a certain troublesome fool, Dionisio Barone, of Castel Guelfo: a rank Buonapartist. He is descended from that ancient family which, when but petty lords of Germany, in their wars with the Ghibelines, contrived to involve all the seignories, the cities, and families of Italy in feuds and bloodshed: and all 'for the sake of a vile cur!' as Giovanni Fiorentino tells us in

his novel. Now, since the wars of Campanella the rebel-friar, there has existed a bitter quarrel between the family of Alfieri and that of the Barone; who (as he has been making himself more than usually active and obnoxious of late) may, in my absence, overrun my territory with his followers and the banditti, and sack the villa. He is encouraged by the success of the French; whose general has abetted him in many an act of outrage and hostility."

We had now reached a splendid saloon, where a smooth floor of oak planks with the brightest polish, amply compensated for the want of a comfortable carpet: indeed this was not missed, while observing the richly gilded furniture, the superb frescoes on the ceiling, the graceful masses of rich drapery breaking the outline of lofty casement-windows, and the trophied arms, marble vases, and dark paintings by ancient masters, which adorned the walls. How all these gay things had escaped the French seemed a miracle.

A mandolin, with some leaves of music, a veil, a small kid glove, and a bouquet of roses, lying upon a side table, announced that the villa was the residence of ladies; and my curiosity became strongly excited. I had heard much of the beauty of the Roman and Neapolitan women—of the rich lustre of their dark eyes, and their classic loveliness of face and form; I was anxious, therefore, to have the happiness of an introduction to the fair inhabitants of the villa. Such rapturous descriptions had been given of the charms of these Juno-like damsels, by officers who served with the Russians, under our general and Sir James Craig, at Naples, a short time before the Calabrese expedition was set on foot; that these, coupled with tender recollections of a certain adventure at Palermo, made me feel doubly interested in making acquaintance with the female branches of this noble family.

Giacomo Belloni (the man in the parti-coloured garments), who acted as butler and maggior-domo, or steward, superintended the arrangement of decanters, ices, grapes, and other refreshments; and by Santugo's invitation I was about to seat myself at a table, when two ladies entered. The elder was a stately-looking gentildonna, about fifty years of age, robed in black satin. Her face, with its pale and blanched complexion, instead of exhibiting the ugliness so common in the elderly women of South Italy, wore traces of what perhaps had once been perfect loveliness; while her full dark eyes, and ebon hair, arranged in massive braids above a noble forehead, gave her, when viewed at a little distance, an aspect of statuesque beauty of form, though sadly faded by the dissipation of fashionable life; and I saw that she freely used both rouge and bella-donna. Luigi introduced me, and I learned she was the dowager Viscontessa, his mother.

The younger lady was his cousin, Bianca d'Alfieri; who even at first appeared to me a strikingly beautiful girl: a captivating manner rendered the gentle expression of her features still more pleasing, as our acquaintance ripened. Her

soft, bright, hazel eyes were shaded by lashes of the deepest jet, and her finely arched eyebrows were of the same sable hue. Glossy black tresses were braided like a coronet around her superb head, whence a mass of fine ringlets flowed over a neck and shoulders which would have been considered fair even in our own land of fair beauties; and in sunny Italy were deemed white as the new fallen snow. The charms of her face and figure were rendered still more striking by the richness of her attire, and the splendid jewels which sparkled in her hair, on her bosom, and her delicate arms. Much has been said about the witchery of unadorned beauty; but the appearance of Bianca d'Alfieri, arrayed in the splendour of full dress, and adorned with all that wealth and Italian taste could furnish to enhance her natural loveliness, was truly magnificent.

But how awkward was our greeting! The little I knew of her language had been picked up at the mess of Florestan's Italian Guard at Palermo, and she knew not a word of English; so we could only maintain a broken conversation, while her cousin the Visconte laughed without ceremony at my blunders. Our interview was stupid enough; and yet not without interest, for my delight was equal to my surprise on beholding in the young lady one with whom I had been acquainted at Palermo: indeed, I had been quite in love with her for a time, until the unlucky route arrived from head-quarters, and she became almost forgotten when we changed our cantonments.

My readers will kindly indulge me while I relate a short reminiscence of my first introduction at the Sicilian capital; for, besides being of importance to my story, it affords an illustration of the peculiar manner of the time and country.

One night, at Queen Carolina's grand theatre, I observed, in the dress-circle, three young ladies, whose beauty made them the stars of the evening. Every glass, double and single barrelled, was levelled at them from boxes and pit, with the coolest impertinence. None present knew aught of them; save that they belonged to a Calabrese family of distinction, which had retired to Palermo on the advance of Joseph's army to Naples. The youngest (whom I had now the happiness of recognising) seemed to me the most attractive; although, perhaps, less stately and dashing than her sisters Ortensia and Francesca: and truly she was one of those enchanting beings whom a man meets but once in a life-time; or at least imagines so. I was in the next box to them, with some of Sir John's gay staff, when, inspired with admiration of their beauty, the whole house rose, *en masse*, on their retiring. I followed the three beauties to the portico, out of mere curiosity, to see what sort of a "turn out" they had, and endeavour to discover who they were. A handsome carriage, adorned with a coronet, stood at the steps to receive them. By the mismanagement of the driver and chasseur, it had run foul of the equipage of Castel Guelfo, the Calabrian Baron before mentioned; a volley of abuse was exchanged by the servants, who soon came to blows: knives

were drawn, and the chasseur of each carriage unsheathed his hanger. With a lack of gallantry not usual on the continent, the proprietor of the other vehicle, a sour-visaged, withered little mortal, would not yield an inch. Terrified by the uproar, the kicking and plunging of horses, the swearing of servants and the clamour of a gathering mob, the timid Italian girls stood trembling and irresolute on the steps of the illuminated portico. I advanced to make an offer of my services as an escort. They surveyed me for a moment, while their large dark eyes dilated with pleasure and thankfulness. I was a stranger, it was true; but my staff uniform and commission were sufficient introduction: the moment was critical, and my services were at once accepted.

I commanded the baron to wheel back his calesso; and did so with an air of determination and authority.

"Superba!" cried the little man, ironically; "who the devil are you?"

"That you will discover in the morning, my lord," I answered, sternly; "but, in the mean time, order your driver to rein back, or I will slash his cattle across the face."

"Not the thousandth part of an inch!" exclaimed the little man, from the depths of his carriage. "And hark you, Signor Carozziere, whip up your horses, and hold fast: on your life!"

"Monsignore Barone, once more I request—"

"Fico! I am in waiting for the Princess of Paterna: and is my carriage to give way before that of my bitterest enemy? Hear me, good people," he added, addressing the increasing mob, among whom I recognised many of the savage conciarotti—a tribe, or faction, which was long the terror of the citizens, and disgrace of Palermo—"hark-ye, sirs! you all know me—Baróne Guelfo, of the Vale of Amato—a true patriot, a despiser of Jacobins, and hater of Frenchmen. Is my carriage to make way for that of the Visconte di Santugo, a follower of Ruffo, the Buonapartist—a traitor to his king, to Naples, and to Sicily—an upstart signorello of yesterday? I draw name and blood from the house of Guelfo, the foes of the Ghibellines, and one of the most ancient races of northern Italy."

"Beware what you assert, Signore Baróne!" said Zacheo, the old chasseur; "Santugo, who is now fighting bravely in La Syla, is the reverse of a traitor, and may yet make you eat your words with an ounce bullet."

"Hell contains not a blacker traitor!" cried the baron, starting half out of his carriage, and animated by the bitterest personal hatred against his enemy. "No, nor Naples a more cunning Buonapartist. And sure I am that the bold-hearted conciarrotti of Palermo will not see the Barone Guelfo, one of the most faithful nobles of the Junta, and grand cup-bearer to his Altezza the Prince of Paterna, insulted in their streets, and his equipage compelled to yield before another."

"Largo! largo! viva il Baróne! largo! make way!" yelled the rabble.

I was excessively provoked at this obstinacy, in the cicisbéo of the princess; it flowed from a political spirit, which I did not altogether understand. Meanwhile, the terror of the three Italian girls, and my anxiety for their safety, increased, as the clamouring conciarotti mustered apace, crowding around us.

The conciarotti! who has not heard of that terrible community, at whose name all Palermo trembled? Like the lazzaroni at Naples and the trasteverini of Rome, a nest of matchless ruffians, banded together by mysterious laws, by ancient privileges and immunities, upon which not even the king or his viceroy dared to infringe; and against whom the power of the civil authorities and the bayonets of the soldiers, the edicts of the Junta and manifestoes from the viceregal palace, were alike levelled fruitlessly and vainly. The enlightened viceroy, the Marchese di Caraccioli, could smother the death-fires of the Inquisition, and demolish its dreaded office; but he dared not meddle with the tanners of Palermo.

The conciarotti, or leather-dressers, occupied the lowest and most filthy parts of the city. In every revolutionary commotion, riot, and brawl, they preeminently distinguished themselves by their murderous ferocity, and wanton outrages; and even during times of the most perfect peace, woe to the sbirro, or officer of the civil courts, who dared to show his face within their districts: which thus became a sanctuary for the robbers and assassins of all Sicily. These, from the date of their entrance, became enrolled among the conciarotti; and to offend one member of this lawless community was sufficient to arouse the whole in arms. Many of the first noblesse in the kingdom were savagely massacred by the conciarotti during the riot of 1820; since when they have been, by the most vigorous efforts, rooted out, and their hideous den, so long a festering sore on the face of Palermo, utterly demolished.

Ripe at all times for wanton outrage, especially against the weak and unoffending, and animated by the prospect of plunder, a rabble of these black-browed artisans, armed with ox-goads, knives, and clubs, threw themselves, with loud yells, upon the carriage which bore the arms of Santugo; they would have smashed it to pieces in a moment, had I not cut their leader down—an act which struck them with a panic—and, aided by Oliver Lascelles (a brother officer, who luckily came up at that moment), drove them back sword in hand. To hurry the ladies up the steps of the carriage, to close the door, and spring on the foot-board behind, was the work of a moment; and we drove off to Sant' Agata Palace, with all the rabble of Palermo yelling in our rear, like a pack of hungry hounds after a fruitless chase.

The splendid mansion of this Calabrese prince would probably have fallen a prey to the furious conciarotti, but for the timely arrival of the Queen's Italian Guard, and a detachment of ours, which were quartered in it for its protection.

Having thus, like a cavalier of romance, obtained a strong claim to the

gratitude of the young ladies, next night, at a gay fête given by the Prince of St. Agatha, I made all my approaches to these fair belles in due form: opened the trenches between the figures of a quadrille, came to closer quarters in the waltz, and kept up such a continual fire of little attentions and gallant nonsense, that ere the ball closed I congratulated myself on having made a favourable impression where I had some anxiety to please. I returned to my gloomy quarters in Fort la Galita, with my head buzzing from the effects of the prince's good wine and the myriad wax-lights which illuminated his saloons, to dream of Italian eyes and ankles, Sicilian gaiety, and the soft voice and softer smile of Bianca d'Alfieri, until aroused next morning by our drums beating the *generale* in the echoing squares of the fortress.

"Dundas, the route for Syracuse has come!" cried Lascelles, knocking lustily at my room door. "We march at daybreak to relieve the 81st. Deuced unpleasant, is it not?"

"Devil take the route!" thought I, as an appointment with Bianca to gallop along the Marina, and drive four-in-hand to Montreale, flashed upon my mind. But there was no help for it. The 62nd bade adieu to "Palermo the Happy," and amid the severe duties of Syracuse, I perhaps ceased for a time to think of Bianca. But to resume.

"Ah, signora!" said I, taking her hand, "you have not quite forgotten me, then?"

"Oh, Signor Claude, how can I forgot that terrible night with the conciarotti?"

"And the ball at the prince's palace?"

A slight blush suffused her soft cheek, and I felt my old penchant returning with renewed strength. "Good!" I thought; "she has not forgotten *my name*." On inquiring for her sisters, Ortensia and Francesca, whose black eyes had so bewitched poor Oliver Lascelles, the young lady changed colour, as if one part of my inquiry distressed her, and the Visconte appeared a little disconcerted. I had made an unlucky blunder, yet knew not how.

"Ortensia is married to the Cavaliere Benedetto del Castagno," replied Bianca; "and dear Francesca has taken the veil, and resides in her convent at Crotona."

The Visconte interrupted any further questioning, by warmly thanking me for the attention I had shown to his cousins in saving them from the insults of the Sicilian rabble. A very long and common-place conversation then ensued, about the probable issue of our expedition, politics, and the fashionable gossip of Palermo; until the subject was changed by the entrance of Giacomo Belloni, to announce that the carriage was in readiness. The Viscontessa rose, and began to apologize for having to leave me; but as it was a playing night at Casa Sant'

Agata at Nicastro, the prince would be indignant if she were absent.

"Bianca and I are constant visitors at the prince's conversazioni; and as all the elite of the Lower Province are invited in honour of your army landing, it is so impossible to absent oneself, that you must indeed excuse us. Visconte, you will, of course, remain?"

"Impossible!" replied Luigi; "I am bound in honour to visit the prince's tables to-night, and to give Castelermo, the Maltese commander, a chance of regaining the thousand ducats I won from him—ay, per Baccho! and lost immediately afterwards to that cursed hunchback, Gaspare Truffi. Signor, I am puzzled! To stay away would offend my powerful friend, the prince; and yet, to go, even should you accompany us, may seem lacking in politeness——"

"I have already received an invitation, my lord," said I; "a chasseur of the prince's household arrived at the camp, just before I left, with cards for the general and staff officers."

"Benissimo! excellent! Then you go, of course?"

I bowed and assented. Knowing how deeply the desperate passion of gaming was rooted in the hearts of the Neapolitans, I expected to behold something altogether new—card-playing on a grand scale; and desiring my valise to be unstrapped from the saddle of Cartouche, I retired to make a hurried toilet for the prince's conversazione.

CHAPTER IV.
DOUBLE OR QUIT!

The ladies soon appeared attired for the carriage; each closely shawled, with her elaborately dressed hair covered by an ample riding-hood of black satin. The evening had now turned to night, and four servants bearing links lighted us to the portico; where stood the well hung and clashing carriage of the Visconte, whose footmen were clad in a livery so gay, that my uniform was almost cast in the shade by comparison.

The vehicle being light, and the horses swift and strong, we dashed at a tremendous rate over a road so rough and stony that all attempts at conversation were rendered futile by the jolting and noise: I never endured such a shaking, save once, when I had the pleasure of being conveyed, severely wounded, from Cefalu to Palermo, on a sixteen-pounder gun. All the Neapolitans, I believe, are

addicted to furious driving. As the carriage swayed from side to side, I expected, at every lurch, that the whole party would be upset, and scattered on the road. However, no such mishap occurred, and in a very short time, with the gay chasseur galloping in front, we were flying through the paved streets of Nicastro—a large and well built city, on the frontiers of the Upper Province.

High hills, covered with thick foliage, and watered by innumerable cascades, arise on every side of Nicastro; while towering above its houses and ample convents, stands the black, embattled keep of the ancient castle: within the strong chambers of which Enrico, Prince of Naples, paid the penalty of his rebellion, by a long and dreary captivity.

We drove through a lofty archway, and drew up in the crowded quadrangle of a brilliantly-illuminated palace; from the windows of which the light streamed down on densely-packed carriages, horses richly caparisoned, gilded hammercloths, and the glancing plumes and liveries of footmen, drivers, and chasseurs, or outriders. The palace was situated immediately opposite the shrine of poor Sancto Gennaro—whom we involved in total darkness, by extinguishing all his consecrated tapers as we swept through the Strada Ruffo.

On alighting, I was about to give my arm to the Viscontessa, but happily her son anticipated me, and I had the more agreeable office of ushering his fair cousin up the splendid staircase of the mansion; which displayed on every hand the usual profusion of vases and Italian statuary, coloured lamps, gilding, and frescos.

"It is, then, a conversazione?" I observed to Bianca.

"Yes, signor; but you will find little conversing here," she replied, smiling in such a way as to reveal a row of brilliant little teeth. "Ah! 't is a horrible den!" she added, with a sigh. "You are a stranger among us, and will surely become a victim. Oh, caro signor! let me implore you not to play, whatever my cousin the Visconte may say to induce you, as you will surely be stripped of every ducat: and above all, do not quarrel with any one, or you will as certainly be—killed!"

"Pleasant!" said I, surprised at her advice, and the earnestness with which it was given. "But I trust, cara signora, that my Scottish caution will protect me from the first danger; while a keen blade and a stout arm may be my guard against the second."

"Alas!" she sighed, "your sabre will little avail you in an encounter with the stiletto of a revengeful Calabrian. Said you, signor, that you came from la Scozia—the land of Ossian and Fingal?"

I looked upon her animated face with surprise and inquiry.

"Ah! why so astonished? I have read the Abate Melchior Cesarotti, with whose translation all Italy is enraptured. But, Signor Claude," she added gaily, "remember my caution: you are under my guidance to-night."

I pressed the hand of the amiable girl, and assured her that I would abide entirely by her advice. I could not sufficiently admire that innate goodness of heart which made her so interested in the welfare and safety of a comparative stranger.

The noble staircase, the illuminated corridors, and magnificent saloons of the palace, were crowded with all the rich, the gay, and the luxurious of Nicastro and the villas scattered along the coast, and fresh arrivals were incessantly alighting from vehicles of every description—the lumbering and gorgeous old-fashioned chariot, the clattering calesso, and the humble jog-trot sedan. Some guests came on horseback; but none who could avoid it came on foot: to use his legs on such an occasion would be considered a blot on the escutcheon of a Neapolitan gentleman; who, if he has the least pretension to dignity, deems some sort of vehicle an indispensable appendage. But the French had appropriated a vast number of horses for baggage and other purposes; and those cavaliers who had lost their equipages were fain to steal in unseen among the press, or remain at home; forfeiting the rich harvest which the open halls and ample tables of the Prince of Sant' Agata promised to every needy gentleman, sharp-witted dowager, and desperate rogue.

"Truly," thought I, while surveying the gay assemblage, "the land is not so desolate as we have been led to imagine!" But probably so dazzling a concourse would not have met, but for the presence of our army; which now lay between them and their hated enemies.

In a spacious saloon ornamented with statues and paintings, where the lights of the girandoles were flashed back from gilded pendants and shining columns and sparkled in bright gems and brighter eyes, stood the prince, receiving the stream of company glittering with epaulettes, orders, stars, and jewellery, which poured in through the folding-doors. He was a withered little man, whom I had often seen at Palermo. Like too many who were present, he was said to have succumbed to General Regnier; but now, encouraged by our presence, he had hoisted the flag of the Bourbons on his palace, and donned the green uniform of the Sicilian Scoppetteria, or Fusiliers of the Guard, while the star of St. Mark the Glorious sparkled on his breast.

None of our staff had yet arrived; and the Signora Bianca presented me formally to her relation the prince; who inquired, with an affectation of interest, about the health of the general—the number of our forces—what news of the enemy: but I saw him no more that night. Moving onward with the throng, we found ourselves passing through the opposite folding-doors, opening into another room of the suite, which was the grand scene of operations. Here the tables for faro and rouge-et-noir were already glittering with ducats, piastres, and yellow English guineas, mingled with Papal scudi and Venetian sequins. Seats

were seized, and places occupied, with the utmost eagerness: but I had not made up my mind whether to play or not. Standing behind Bianca's chair, and leaning over the back of it, I was much more occupied with her snowy shoulders, her uplifted eyes, and parted rosy lips, when she turned towards me, than with the company; of whom she gave me an account. To my surprise, she included in her enumeration one or two very jaunty cavaliers, who were supposed to be leaders of banditti—or, to speak more gently, free companions—who had been raised to the rank of patriotic soldiers by turning their knives and rifles against the French, and co-operating with the chiefs of the Masse.

I confessed that I did not feel quite at home in such mixed society; but Bianca only smiled at my scruples, shrugged her fair shoulders, and made no reply.

A soft symphony, which at that moment floated from the music-gallery through the lofty apartments, preluded the famous waltz of Carolina, and announced that a few of the younger visitors preferred the more polite and graceful amusement of the dance to rattling dice and insipid cards.

"Deuced hot here, is it not?" said Lascelles, my brother aide-de-camp, as he passed me, adroitly handing a very pretty girl through the press round the tables. "The dancers are beginning; for the honour of the corps, you must join us, or some of those fellows of the 81st may march away with your fair companion." He moved away, with a knowing wink.

"'T is the little Signora Gismondo—very pretty, is she not?" said Bianca. The girl might have been termed supremely beautiful; and not more so than unfortunate: but of that more anon. She waved her hand invitingly to Bianca, and with her long satin train swept through the folding-doors. Fearful of being anticipated by some of our staff, whom I saw in close confab' with Santugo, I solicited the hand of his fair cousin for the first waltz.

She glanced inquiringly at her aunt, who, smiling, bowed an assent, as she swept a pile of ducats towards her. I drew the white-gloved hand of Bianca across my arm; and in a moment more we were whirling in the giddy circle of the waltzers.

With so fair a partner, and a heart buoyant with youth, vivacity, and love, how joyously one winds through the mazes of that voluptuous dance which is peculiarly the national measure of Italy. Never shall I forget the happiness of that "hour of joy"—the time when Bianca raised her soft, hazel eyes to mine, as if imploring the additional support which my arm so readily yielded—the beaming smile and hurried whisper,—the half caress, with soft curls fanning your cheek, the flushing face and flashing eye—oh, the giddy, joyous waltz! It has a charm which will alike outlive prudish censure and pungent satire: even that of the witty Lance Langstaff. I mentally bequeathed Santugo to the great master of

mischief, when he dragged us back to the gambling saloon.

After a scanty allowance of ices, wine and fruit had been handed round, or scrambled for at the side tables, the most important business of the evening commenced in earnest. Then came the tug of war! Hundreds of eager eyes, some of them bright and bewitching, were greedily gloating on the shifting heaps, which glittered on the tables of the prince's hell: for, by thus disgracing his palace, his altezza cleared an annual income of twelve thousand ducats. The closeness of the evening, combined with the pressure of the crowd at the tables, soon rendered the atmosphere of the saloon quite oppressive; the faces of the ladies became flushed, and the iced malvasia was most acceptable and delicious.

The general and staff had by this time arrived, and I soon became aware that we were the lions of the evening: our scarlet uniforms and silver epaulettes attracted universal observation. My fair Italian was sensible of this, and seemed proud to have me as her cavalier: her eyes sparkled with animation, and her vivacity increased; while her little heart bounded with delight at this momentary triumph over sundry disappointed cavalieri and female rivals. Vanity apart, a rich foreign uniform on a tolerably good figure has a great attraction for female eyes. But counts and countesses, cavaliers and signoras, even dark-robed ecclesiastics (for there was a sprinkling of them), soon became completely absorbed in the affairs of the table: for gambling is the ruling passion on the continent.

"They neither have nor want any other amusement than this last," says Kotzebue, writing of the Neapolitans. "The states of Europe are overthrown; they game not the less. Pompeii comes forth from its grave; they game still. Vesuvius vomits forth flames, yet the splendid gaming-table is not left. The ruins of Paestum a few miles distant, shining as it were before every eye, must be discovered by strangers: for the Neapolitans are gaming. The greatest dukes and princes are keepers of gambling-tables." As it was in the capital, so was it in all the provinces.

Most of the ladies were attended by cavaliers; some of the married, by that indescribable contingent on Italian matrimony (which we must hope is disappearing)—*a cicisbéo*. A courtly old gentleman who had attended the Viscontessa during her married life, now sat beside her; sorting her cards, handing ices, and smiling as sweetly as if she were still a belle: he was the Signor Battista Gismondo, a major of the loyal Masse. On the other side sat Bianca, watching the various turns of the game; although, for a time, she refused to take a part in it herself.

We were seated at the faro table, the acting banker of which was the Duke of Bagnara, a professed gamester, and friend of the prince; as also were the croupiers, il Cavaliere Benedetto del Castagno, and Castelermo, a knight of Malta, with whom I had been on terms of intimacy at Palermo. The latter was bailiff, or

commander, of St. Eufemio: but, alas! in the wars of Buonaparte, the commanderie had been scattered, and the preceptory house reduced to ruins. He was a tall, swarthy, broad-chested, and noble-looking fellow, and still wore the habit of his order: a scarlet uniform, lapelled and faced with black velvet, and laced with gold, having epaulettes of the same, with an eight-pointed cross of silver on each; a large silver cross of eight points figured on the breast, and an embroidered belt sustained a long cross-hilted sword. Coal-black mustachios, protruding fiercely from his upper lip, completed his soldier-like aspect. One of the last knights of his order, he was, perhaps, also the last of his proud and distinguished race; and he certainly looked a thorough Italian cavalier of the old school.

Before the banker lay heaps of coin, to which the gamesters continually directed their greedy eyes, flashing alternately with rage, exultation, or envy, as the piles of gold and silver changed owners, and were swept hurriedly into bags and purses by the long bony fingers of sharp-eyed priests, and sharper old ladies: who were too often winners to be pleasant company at the tables generally. Although the duke was the nominal holder of the bank, Santugo (who had lost considerably, and was, therefore, out of humour) informed me that the prince had the principal share in it, and that the profits were divided between them, when the company separated. I could not but feel the greatest disgust at the place, and contempt for the majority of the company; where women of rank and beauty degraded themselves by mixing with high-born blacklegs and professed gamesters, whose tricks and expressions were worthy of the meanest "hell" in London or Paris.

One hideous fellow, in particular, attracted my attention. He was a dwarf, and bulky in figure, but scarcely four feet in height, and miserably deformed: his head and arms would have suited a strong man of six feet high; but the head was half buried between his brawny shoulders and a prodigious hump, which rose upon his back, and his arms reached far below his bandy knees. He had the aspect as well as the proportions of a baboon; for masses of black and matted locks hung round his knobby and unshapely cranium, while a bushy beard of wiry black hair, and thick, dirty mustachios, with fierce eyes twinkling restlessly on each side of an enormous nose, made up a visage of satyr-like character. His person contrasted strangely with the garb he wore, which was the serge robe of San Pietro di Pisa: a brotherhood suppressed in 1809 by a decree of Murat, King of Naples.

This monster was the most successful player present: he eyed the cards in the hand of others more keenly than his own suite; and I soon became convinced that he knew the backs as well as the fronts of them: yet the cards were perfectly new. He was opposed to the Viscontessa, and notwithstanding her skill, acquired by the nightly gamblings of five-and-thirty years, he stripped her of a thousand

ducats; every bet he made being successful: his long ungainly arms and large brown hands, found continual occupation in sweeping the money into a vast pouch which hung at his knotted girdle; and he always accompanied the act with such a provoking grin of malignant exultation, that I felt inclined to box his ears.

Bianca d'Alfieri blushed and trembled with shame and sorrow, on beholding the defeat and bitter mortification of her aunt; who sat like a statue of despair, when her last ducat vanished into the capacious bag of the hideous, little religioso: but her misery was unheeded by those around, and even by her son, whose angry gestures and flashing eyes led me to suppose that he was encountering an equal run of bad fortune at the rouge-et-noir table. He had acted all night as a sort of assistant to the banker, whom he often rendered uneasy by the enormous stakes he answered.

"Bravone! sharper! oh, villain hunchback!" exclaimed the old lady, kindling with uncontrollable fury at the loss of her gold; "I will punish thee yet! My jewels are still left, and demon, though thou art in face and figure, never shalt thou conquer Giulia d'Alfieri."

She unclasped a tiara of brilliants from her head, removed a costly necklace from her bosom, and with trembling haste drew off her rings and bracelets, which she cast on the table as a stake. The banker and the knight of Malta attempted to interpose; but the hunchback had already accepted the challenge with a fiendish grin of delight, promising to answer the stake on his own responsibility.

"Madonna mia! my dearest aunt, beware!" urged the plaintive voice of Bianca: but the Viscontessa heard her not. With straining eyes she watched the fatal cards, which once more were told out slowly and deliberately; while every eye was fixed, and every lip compressed, as if the fate of Europe lay on the turning up of these "bits of painted pasteboard."

The Viscontessa lost! Clasping her hands, she looked wildly round her for a moment; Gismondo, her venerable cicisbéo, presented his arm, and led her from the table in an agony of chagrin. Bianca unconsciously laid her hand on mine, and sighed deeply.

"I am a sharper and bully, am I, illusstrissima?" chuckled the hunchbacked rogue, as he swept the glittering jewels into his pouch, and chuckled, wheezed, grinned, and snapped his fingers, like an animated punchinello.

"Bravo! bravissimo! The signora called me ass too, I think! A hard name to use in this illustrious company. Ho, ho! there are few asses so richly laden, and fewer bullies whose bags are so well filled."

"Silence, fellow!" cried Castelermo, sternly; "silence, and begone!"

"Instantly," replied the other, with a dark look; "but keep me in remembrance, signor. I am Gaspare Truffi—thou knowest me: all on this side of Naples know me; and some on the other side, too." Here his eyes encountered mine,

which I had unconsciously fixed upon him, with an angry frown of astonishment and contempt.

"Ho, ho! Signor Subalterno," said he, not daunted in the least; "spare your frowns for those whom they are calculated to frighten. I have not seen you playing to-night—will you try your hand with me? But, no; you dare not: you are afraid to risk a paltry bajocco!"

"Signor Canonico!" I replied, sternly, "beware how you venture to insult or taunt me. Recollect, rascal, that neither the presence upon which you have intruded yourself, nor your black robe, may be a protection against a horsewhip, should I be provoked so far as to use one on that unshapely figure of yours."

"Corpo di Cristo!" cried he, while his eyes glared with avarice and fury; "will you answer my stake, Signor Claude?"

"Undoubtedly: but was it the devil told you my name?"

"You have guessed it, my good friend,—Satan himself," he answered, with a grin; and flung his great heavy purse upon the table.

"A thousand ducats on the black lozenge," said I.

"*Double or quit!*" he rejoined, and I bowed an assent, though I had not above twenty ducats in my purse. But enraged at his insolent arrogance in the presence of so many, I was determined to go on, neck or nothing, and punish him, or myself, for engaging in a contest so contemptible. He staked his money; which it was agreed by the banker and croupiers must be entirely at his own risk, and independent of them. I staked my word, which was of course deemed sufficient. The cards were dealt with a precision which gave me full time to repent (when too late) of the desperate affair in which I had become involved with a regular Italian sharper. I dreaded the disgrace of incurring a debt of honour, which could not be conveniently discharged: for I had no means of raising the money, save by bills on England. There was also to be feared the displeasure of the general; who, like all my countrymen, was stedfastly opposed to gambling, and strictly enforced those parts of the "Articles of War" referring to that fashionable mode of getting rid of one's money. Agitated by these disagreeable thoughts, I knew not how the game went: the room, seemed to swim around me; and I was first aroused to consciousness by Bianca's soft arm pressing mine, and by a rapturous burst of exultation from the company, who had crowded, in breathless expectation, around the table.

I had won!

Gaspare Truffi uttered a furious imprecation, and tossing out of his bloated bag a thousand and ten ducats, together with all the jewels he had so recently won, the discomfited dwarf rushed from the table, with a yell like that of a wounded lynx. I now rose greatly in the estimation of the right honourable company: they crowded round me with congratulations for my victory over the

hunchbacked priest; whom they seemed equally to dread and despise.

The jewels and gold I secured in my breast pocket, lest some nimble hand in the crowd might save me the trouble. It was by this time long past midnight, and Luigi, who had borne an unusual run of ill-luck not very philosophically, proposed that we should retire. He had lost a large sum of money to the Baron di Bivona, and they parted in high displeasure, with mutual threats and promises of meeting again.

We were soon in the carriage, and leaving Nicastro behind us at the rate of twelve miles an hour. When passing through the porch of the palace, I caught sight of a strange crouching figure looking like a black bundle under the shadow of a column. A deep groan, as the carriage swept past, announced that it was the hunchback, whom I had perhaps reduced to penury. For a moment the contest and the victory were repented; but a few hours afterwards proved to me that he was unworthy of commiseration.

CHAPTER V.

GASPARE TRUFFI, THE HUNCHBACK.

"Beware! Signor Claude," said the Visconte, as we drove homewards; "you have now made a most deadly enemy in Calabria. Do you know whom you have defeated?"

"An itinerant priest, probably," I answered, with a slight tone of pique.

"A priest, certainly; but, thank Heaven! we have few such either in Naples or Sicily. Though expelled from the brotherhood of San Baldassare, in Friuli, for some irregularities, (which, in the days of the late inquisitor, Tourloni, could only have been cleansed by fire) Gaspare Truffi still wears the garb of a religious order—generally that of St. Peter of Pisa—that he may the more easily impose upon the peasantry; who stand in no little awe of his harsh voice, misshapen figure, and hideous visage. On the mountains I have seen him in a very different garb: with a poniard in his sash, and the brigand's long rifle slung across his back. He is said to be in league with the banditti in the wilderness; and, as the confessor of Francatripa, he has obtained considerable sway over them. On more than one occasion, in the encounters between the brigands and the French, he has given undisputable proofs of valour; though clouded by fearful cruelty. You have heard of the wilderness of La Syla? There the mountains rise in vast ridges abruptly

from the sea, shooting upward, peak above peak; their sides clothed with gloomy and impenetrable wood, or jagged with masses of volcanic rock, which overhang and threaten the little villages that nestle in the valleys below. Tremendous cascades and perpendicular torrents—broad sheets of water fringed with snow-white foam—leap from cliff to cliff, and thundering down echoing chasms, seek their way, through mountain gorges, to the ocean. Into one of the frightful valleys of that secluded district, a body of French troops, commanded by the Marchese di Monteleone, were artfully drawn by Francatripa, the brigand chief, Gaspare, his lieutenant and confessor, and all their horde; by whom the whole unhappy battalion, to the number of five hundred rank and file, were utterly exterminated. Thick as hail the rifle balls showered down from all sides; and ponderous masses of rock, dislodged by crowbars, were hurled from the cliffs along the line of march of that doomed regiment. Save the marchese and his aide, every man perished; and the place is yet strewn with their bones for miles—a ghastly array of skeletons, scarce hidden amid the weeds and long rank grass, and bleaching in the sun as the wolves and vultures left them."

"Cruel! horrible!" said Bianca, clasping her hands.

"Benissimo!" continued my enthusiastic friend; "it was a just retribution for those whom they slaughtered hourly in their Golgotha at Monteleone. It was a striking example of Calabrian courage and Italian vengeance! It will be recorded in history like the terrible 'Sicilian Vespers.'"

"A pretty picture of society!" I observed: "and such wretches as that apostate priest are permitted to attend the entertainments of the Prince of St. Agatha?"

"You must not criticise us too severely," replied Luigi. "The truth is, we all perceive that Fra Truffi is not an apostle; but he is the lieutenant and confessor of Francatripa, who is esteemed the greatest patriot in the province, and with whom it is not the prince's interest to quarrel, in the present disorganized state of society. Besides, he has plenty of ducats to spend, and he plays freely and fearlessly; which is the principal, and indeed essential qualification to ensure respect and admittance to the first gambling-tables in the land. Per Baccho! here is the villa—we have arrived at last!" he exclaimed, as the carriage drew up before the dark façade of his ancestral mansion.

Before the Viscontessa retired, I presented her with her ducats and jewels which I had won back from the hunchback: but she would by no means accept of them, and seemed for a moment to be almost incensed at my offer. I apologized, and returned the ducats to my purse: they proved a very seasonable reinforcement to my exchequer; which racing, gambling, and our four-in-hand club at Palermo, had considerably drained. But the jewels I absolutely refused to retain; and a polite contest ensued, which ended by Luigi proposing that Bianca

should present them to her patron, St. Eufemio, whose famous shrine stood in the church of the Sylvestrians at Nicastro.

Although aware that by this arrangement these splendid trinkets would become the prey of the greedy priesthood, I could not offer a remonstrance against such a proposition, and only requested permission to present Bianca with the necklace. I beheld with secret joy the beautiful girl blushing and trembling with pleasure: she did not venture, however, to raise her full bright eyes to mine, as I clasped the string of lustrous gems around her "adorable neck."

"A holy night to you, Signor Claude," said her aunt, as they rose to retire; "we shall not perhaps see you when you leave the villa, with my son and his people, for the British camp. But O, caro signor," she added, pressing my hand affectionately, "we wish you and your companions all safety and success in fighting against the enemies of our king: on bended knees, before the blessed patron of Alfieri, will my whole household and myself implore it. And remember, whenever you have spare time in the intervals of your military duty, the inmates of the Villa d'Alfieri will ever be most happy to welcome you."

She retired, leaning on the arm of Bianca, who merely bowed as she withdrew. The expressive glance I cast after her retiring figure did not escape the quick-sighted Visconte, who gave me a peculiar—shall I say haughty?—smile, which brought the blood to my cheek: my heart misgave me that in time coming I might find him a formidable rival. Young, handsome, rich, and titled, and enjoying all the privileges which relationship gave him, he was indeed to be dreaded by a poor sub of the line.

"Giacomo!" cried he to his follower, "draw back the curtains, and open the windows towards the sea. Cospetto! the air of these rooms is like the scirrocco—the malaria of the marshes—or the breath of the very devil! Bring champagne, and lay dice and cards—no, by Heaven! I have had enough of them to-night. Bring us the roll of our volunteers, and then begone to your nest; for Signor Claude and I intend to finish the morning jovially. And, olà! Giacomo, see that all our fellows are up with the lark, mustered in the quadrangle, and at Lieutenant Dundas's disposal, by daybreak."

The lofty casements were thrown open, revealing the midnight ocean, in which the stars were reflected, together with streaks of lurid light thrown across the deep blue sky by the beacon fires of the armed parties along the coast. The murmuring sea dashed its waves into foam beneath the arched galleries and overhanging rocks, and the cool breeze, which swept over its rippled surface, being wafted into the saloon, was delightfully refreshing. The wax-lights were trimmed, silver jars and tall Venetian glasses placed on the table; and the bright wine sparkling through the carved crystal of the massive caraffa, and embossed salvers piled with glowing grapes and luscious peaches, made me feel very much

inclined to bring in daylight gloriously. I wished that my friend Lascelles and some of our gay staff at Palermo, or the right good fellows of my regimental mess, had been present.

"Your health, signor," said the Visconte, when Giacomo had filled our glasses and retired. "May you become a Marescial di campo ere you turn your horse's tail on Italy!"

"I thank you, my lord," said I, smiling; "but I shall be very happy if I gain but stars to my epaulettes: and yet, ere that, Massena must be conquered and Rome won!"

"Now, then," he resumed, laying before me a long muster-roll of Italian names, "here are five hundred brave Calabrians, most of them my own immediate dependants, whom I have authority to raise in arms; but who, without the exertion of that authority, are able and willing to serve Ferdinand of Naples: whom Madonna long preserve! although the said Ferdinand is a fool. But unless your general appoints me their leader, and permits me to nominate my own officers, these fellows may desert *en masse* to the mountains; for they are unused to the rule of foreigners."

"Our general is too well aware of the courtesy requisite on his landing on these shores, to dispute with the Italian nobles, or chiefs of the *Masse*, their right to command their own followers. If they will serve obediently, and fight well—obeying as good soldiers must obey, and enduring as they must endure—Sir John Stuart will require nothing more." My enthusiastic friend grasped my hand.

"In our first pitched battle with the enemy," he exclaimed; "place us in front of the line, and we will show il Cavaliére Giovanni Stuardo, that the bold mountaineers of the Apennines are not less hardy or courageous than their ancestors were when Rome was in the zenith of its glory."

Puzzled for a moment to recognise the familiar name of the general through the pronunciation of the Visconte, I was deliberating how to reply, when I observed the great gnome-like visage of the hunchback appear at one of the open windows; his fierce twinkling eyes sternly fixed on mine, with the steady glistening gaze of a snake. He levelled a pistol, but it flashed in the pan. My first impulse was to grasp my sabre, my second to spring through the casement, which opened down to the level of the tessellated floor.

"What see you, signor?' exclaimed my astonished host.

"That abominable hunchback, Peter of Pisa, Friar Truffle, or whatever you call him."

"Impossible!" said the Visconte. "Most improbable, indeed! at such an hour of the morning, and in a place where the cliffs descend sheer downwards to the sea!"

"Monsignore, on my honour I saw his ill-omened visage peering between

the rose-bushes."

Luigi snatched a sword from the wall, and we made tremendous havoc among the full-blown roses, searching so far as we dared to venture along the beetling rocks; but no trace of the eaves-dropper could be discovered. Indeed, the dangerous nature of the place, when I surveyed it, led me to suppose that I *might* have been mistaken, and that the apparition was an illusion of a heated imagination; for my head was now beginning to swim with the effects of the champagne. Santugo, however, took the precaution of bolting the casements, and drawing the curtains; after which we stretched ourselves once more on the couches to listen for any sound that announced the approach of an intruder.

"Ha! what is that?" exclaimed Santugo abruptly, as a dropping or pattering sound was heard on the floor.

"The deuce! my wound bleeds!" said I, on finding that the slight sword thrust which I had received in the morning had broken out afresh; probably in consequence of my exertions when searching for the hunchback.

"A wound!" rejoined Santugo, with astonishment; "I knew not that you had been hurt this morning in your skirmish with the voltigeurs."

"A mere scratch, Visconte," I replied, with a jaunty carelessness, half affected, as I unbuttoned my uniform coat, and found with surprise that the sleeve and white kerseymere vest were completely saturated with blood. Through my neglect, and the heat of the climate, the wound was becoming more painful than I could have expected so slight a thrust to be.

"Sancto Januario! you never said a word of all this!" cried Luigi, alarmed by seeing so much blood. "Olà, there!" he added, springing to the door. "Giacomo Salvatore! Andronicus! you Greek vagabond!"

In three minutes we had all the male portion, of the household about us, with faces of alarm, in motley garbs and variously armed.

Giacomo, who had gained some knowledge as a leech during his innumerable skirmishes with the French, bathed the wound and bound up my arm in a very scientific manner; after which I bade my host adieu, and requested to be shown to my apartment. In truth, it was time to be napping, when in three hours afterwards we should be on the march for Maida.

My sleeping-room was in a part of the villa which had formed a tower of the ancient castle; and, if there were any ghosts in merry Naples, it was just the place where one would have taken up its quarters. It was named the *wolf's chamber*; the legend thereof the reader will learn towards the close of my narrative. A large black stain on the dark oaken planks of the floor yet remained, in testimony of some deed of blood perpetrated in the days of Campanella; when a fierce civil war was waged in Southern Italy.

That I had seen the face of the hunchback palpably and distinctly, I had

little doubt, when recalling the whole affair to mind; and I had none whatever that the hideous little man had great reason to be my enemy. At that unhappy gaming-table, I had stripped him, perhaps, of every coin he possessed, as well as the rich jewels he had won: a double triumph, which, coupled with my sarcasm on his appearance, was quite enough to whet his vengeance against me. In truth, it was impossible to feel perfectly at ease while reflecting that he might still be lurking about the villa; aye, perhaps under my very bed.

More than once, when about to drop asleep, the sullen dash of the waves in the arcades below the sea-terrace aroused me to watchfulness; and I started, half imagining that the bronze figures on the ebony cabinet, or the bold forms in a large dark painting by Annibale Carracci, were instinct with life.

Presently I saw a shadow pass across the muslin curtains of my bed, and a figure gliding softly between me and the night-lamp, which burned on a carved bracket upheld by a beautiful statue of a virgin bearing sacred fire. The sight aroused me in an instant; recalled my senses, quickened every pulse, and strung every nerve for action. Remaining breathlessly still, until my right hand had got a firm grasp of my sabre (which luckily lay on the other side of the couch), I dashed aside the curtains and sprang out of bed, just in time to elude the furious stroke of a Bastia knife; which, had it taken effect on my person instead of the down pillows, would have brought my Calabrian campaign to a premature and most unpleasant close.

It was Truffi, the hunchback! Exasperated by this second attempt upon my life, I rushed upon him. He made a bound towards the window, through which he had so stealthily entered by unfastening the Venetian blind; but at the moment he was scrambling out, my sword descended sheer on his enormous hump. Uttering a howl of rage and anguish, he fell to the ground, where he was immediately seized in the powerful grasp of Giacomo Belloni.

"Signor Teniente!" cried Giacomo, as they struggled together on the very edge of the cliff, "cleave his head while I hold him fast! The stunted Hercules—the cursed crookback! Maladetto! he has the strength of his father the devil! Quick, signor! smite him under the ribs, or he will throw me into the sea!" But before I could arrive to his assistance, the hunchback himself had fallen, or been tossed (Giacomo said the latter) from the balustrade terrace, which overhung the water. He sank in the very spot where Belloni informed me there was a whirlpool, which a hundred years before had sucked down the *San Giovanni*, a galley of the Maltese knights. Escape seemed impossible, and I expected to be troubled with him no more.

"You may sleep safely now, signor," said the panting victor; "he will never annoy you again in this world. The Signora Bianca was afraid that the hunchback might make some attempt upon your chamber (where, to speak truth, blood has

been spilt more than once), and so she ordered me to watch below the window with my rifle; but overcome with wine and the heat of the air I dropped asleep, and was only awakened by his ugly carcass coming squash upon mine!"

"I am deeply grateful to the Signora Bianca for her anxiety and attention. But, Master Giacomo, you must learn to watch with your eyes open, after we take the field to-morrow: nodding on sentry will not do among us."

Giacomo was abashed, and withdrew. Thus closed the adventures of my first day in Lower Calabria.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CALABRIAN FREE CORPS.

Awakened at daybreak by the report of the morning gun from the admiral's ship in the bay, I leaped out of bed, and threw open the casement to enjoy the pure, cool breeze from the sea; for my blood felt hot and feverish: the effects of the wine I had taken during the past evening, and the exciting occurrences of the last few hours. My wounded arm, too, was stiff and painful; but I hoped it would soon cease to give me any inconvenience.

Another bright and cloudless Italian morning: the distant sea and the whole sky, so far as the eye could reach, were all of that pure azure tint which the most pellucid atmosphere alone can produce. The sun had not yet risen, but the east was bright with the dawn, which burnished the rippling surface of the ocean, whose wavelets gleamed alternately with green and gold, as they broke on the shining shore. The morning landscape presented the most vivid contrasts of dazzling light and deep shadow. The peaks of the hills above Maida,—those hills which were so soon to echo the boom of our artillery—the wavy woods which clothed their sides, and the silver current of the reedy Amato, glittered with glowing light; while the bosky vale through which the river wound, and the town of St. Eufemio, were steeped in comparative gloom. The bayonets of the marines on board Sir Sydney's squadron, were gleaming on poop and forecastle; and the red top-light, which burned like a lurid spark amid the well-squared yards and taut black rigging of the flag-ship, cast a long and tremulous ray across the still bosom of the brightening sea. It vanished when the morning-gun flashed forth from the dark port-hole; and, the shrill notes of the boatswains' whistles piping up the hands, when the whole fleet began to heave short on their anchors.

Dressing with expedition, in ten minutes I stood booted and belted in front of the villa, where Santugo and two other cavaliers mustered their recruits. Their appearance, though rather wild, was both romantic and picturesque: they numbered five hundred men; young, athletic, and handsome in person, swarthy in visage, and soldier-like in bearing—the setting-up a little excepted: altogether, they were a very valuable acquisition to our army. Their weapons were of a very miscellaneous and unwarlike character: consisting of clubs, poniards, and the formidable Italian oxgoads which glittered in the sun like lances, with some very indifferent rifles. But I promised the Visconte a sufficient supply of arms, accoutrements, and clothing, when his people were formally arrayed under our standard.

I was welcomed by a shout; and the cavaliers Benedetto del Castagno and Marco di Castelermo received me with the utmost politeness and warmth of manner. Both these gentlemen were of noble families, and enjoyed a high reputation for courage. The first was a merry Neapolitan, who laughed at everything he said; the second the scarred and sun-burnt knight of Malta, on whose handsome features were marked a stern gravity and settled melancholy, no less striking than his garb. He was now enveloped in the dark mantle of his order, having on the left shoulder an eight-pointed cross, sewn in white velvet upon black cloth; the same sacred badge appeared upon the housings of his horse, and various parts of his attire: in silver on his epaulettes, in red enamel on his black velvet forage cap, and in scarlet cloth on the tops of his white leather gauntlets.

To my surprise, I understood that, before marching, solemn mass must be performed; and the Visconte led me to the private oratory, at the altar of which stood Fra Adriano, the chaplain and confessor of the family. The chapel was as gorgeously decorated as many coloured marbles, painted windows, a roof of gilding and fresco, springing from columns covered with the richest mosaic, and shining tessellated floor, could make it. Near the altar stood the celebrated statue of the patron of the Alfieri—Sant' Ugo. It was of oak, carved, gilt, and evidently of great antiquity; but so hideous that it might have passed for Thor, or any monster-god whom our rude forefathers worshipped in the dark ages of druidical superstition. At St. Eufemio, this image was regarded with the utmost veneration; from a belief in the wondrous miracles it wrought, and a tradition that it had been transported through the air by angels, from the saint's little hermitage in the beautiful plain near Palermo. Other relics in the chapel were viewed with no less reverence. I was shewn a leg of the cock which crew to Peter, a rag of the virgin's petticoat, a packet of the egg-shells on which San Lorenzo was broiled, and a tooth of the blessed Ugo! which, from its size and the number of rings, bore so strong a resemblance to the tooth of a horse, that the venerable aspect and earnestness of Adriano scarcely restrained me from laughing outright.

"Fra Adriano is the oldest of our Calabrian priests," observed Luigi, in a whisper: "he has been the confessor of our family for three generations."

"Kneel with us, signor, if it be but to please the good father, who is now verging on his hundredth year;" added the Maltese commander in the same low voice. "Saint John preserve him yet for many years to come: long after the grave has closed over me! He beheld my order when it was in the zenith of its power and glory. Yes, signor, he beheld the galleys of Malta sailing through the straits of Messina, when the grand master Antonio de Vilhena, of most pious and valiant memory, unfurled against the infidels of Algeria the blessed banner of redemption. But these days have passed. The silver keys of Jerusalem, of Acre, and of Rhodes—three cities of strength, over which the knights of our order once held sway—are now paltry trophies in the hands of the British. Struck down by the hand of Napoleon, the banner of God and St. John has sunk for ever, and the red flag of Mahomet may now sweep every shore of the Mediterranean with impunity!" (Lord Exmouth's attack on Algiers did not take place till six years after this time.)

A hundred years spent in the gloomy and monotonous cloister! This priest had dwelt there from his childhood, and I sighed when contemplating the silver hairs, magnificent white beard, and calm features of this fine old man, and reflecting on the long life he had wasted away—a life which might otherwise have been valuable. To what a living tomb had zeal and superstitious piety consigned him!

But to proceed. When the incense had been burned, the wine drunk, the bell rung, the prayers said, and responses given, we softly withdrew; the sweet, low singing of the choristers, mingled with the pealing notes of the organ, filling the little oratory with a burst of melodious harmonies.

After glasses of coffee had been served hastily round, we leaped on our horses; our appearance being the signal for the column of volunteers to get under arms. With no little trouble, we formed them into something like military order, and they moved off in sections of three files abreast. The Maltese knight enjoyed with me a hearty laugh at their shuffling march; but I had no doubt that, after being a few weeks under the tuition of our drill Serjeants, they would all make smart soldiers. Though we marched without the sound of drum or bugle, music was not wanting; two or three improvisatori who were in the ranks struck up a martial song, adapted to the occasion, and the others soon acquired the chorus—even Santugo and his friends joined; and the bold swell of five hundred manly voices ringing in the blue welkin, and awakening the echoes of the wooded hills, produced an effect at once impressive and animating.

These brave hearts formed the nucleus of that *Calabrian corps* which, on many future occasions, fought with such indomitable spirit under the British

standard; which shared in the glories of Maida, the capture of Crotona, the expedition to Naples in 1809, and the storming of the Castle of Ischia, when Colonna, with all his garrison, surrendered to the bravery of Macfarlane and his soldiers.

As I rode round an angle of the villa, I observed the Signora Bianca, muffled in black velvet and sables, watching our departure, from one of the windows. Raising my cocked hat, I bowed, with something more than respect in my manner, at the same time making Cartouche curvet, and riding with as much of the air of "the staff" as I could assume. The graceful girl stepped out into one of the little stone balconies which projected before all the upper windows of the mansion, and I immediately pulled up; she smiled, and waved her hand in adieu. Standing up in my stirrups—"Signora," said I, in a low voice, "never shall I forget your kind anxiety for my safety last night; and believe me, Bianca, since the first moment we met at Palermo—but the Visconte is calling. The enemy are before us, and I may never see you again—adieu!"

"Addio! a reveder la!" she murmured; the blush which the first part of my farewell called forth giving way to paleness.

"May it soon happen, signora!" I added, as, spurring Cartouche, I galloped after the free corps, with my heart beating a little more tumultuously than it had done for a long time—at least since we left England.

"Olà, Dundas!" cried the Visconte, as I came up at a canter, "what has caused you to loiter?"

"My horse's near hind shoe was clattering, and I merely drew up for an instant to examine it," I replied: very unwilling he should suspect or learn the truth.

On our march, my new friends beguiled the tedium of the way by vivid descriptions of their encounters with the enemy, between whom and the Calabrese there had long been maintained a blood-thirsty war of reprisal. Every peasant who fell into the hands of the French, having arms in his possession—even if it were but the ordinary stiletto or ox-goad—was instantly dragged before a standing court-martial, tried, and shot, or else hanged. Every means were adopted by Regnier to exterminate the roving bands of armed peasantry and fierce banditti, who incessantly harassed his troops during all their marches and movements: but in vain. Every tree, shrub, and rock, concealed a rifle, and a stern eye, whose aim was deadly. In secluded spots, where all seemed calm and peaceful but a moment before, or the stillness of the leafy solitude had been broken only by the tap of the drum, or the carol of the merry French soldier—whose native buoyancy of heart often breaks forth in a joyous chorus on the line of march—when least expected, overwhelming ambuscades of wild mountaineers would start up from height and hollow, galling the march of some unhappy party: suddenly the foliage would blaze with the fire of rifles, their sharp reports ringing through the

wood, while whistling bullets bore each one a message of death, responded to by the shrieks and groans of dying men.

But my Italian friends could not yet boast of the frightful massacre of Orzamarzo.

By the wayside I observed a mound of fresh earth, above which rose a cross, composed of two rough pieces of wood. It was the grave of Kraünz, the leader of our Corsicans, who yesterday had been alive, and at their head: to-day, Frank himself could not have wished him lower—poor man!

As we passed through St. Eufemio, the inhabitants followed us *en masse*, filling the air with shouts, and cries of "Long live Ferdinand of Naples! Death to the Corsican tyrant, and Massena the apostate! Death to their soldiery, the slayers of our people!" and the convent bells rang, as for a general jubilee. "Benissimo!" cried I, waving my hat, "Live Caroline! Viva la Reina!" and another tremendous shout, accompanied by the clapping of hands, rent the air.

The sun was now up, and the increasing heat of the morning made a halt for a few minutes not only desirable but requisite. We dismounted at the door of a café kept by a Sicilian (the Sicilians are famed for their ices), and procured a cool and delightful cup of limonea, and long glasses filled with what the seller called sherbet. Meanwhile, our volunteers were busily imbibing all the liquids they could procure from the stationary acquaiuóli, or water-sellers; who retail cool beverages to the passengers, at the corner of every street in a Neapolitan town. A gaudily painted barrel, swinging on an iron axis fixed between the door-posts, is the principal feature of these establishments, which generally open at a street corner; the rough columns supporting it are garnished with tin drinking cups, scoured bright as silver, and in these the seller supplies his customers with pure and sparkling water cooled by snow introduced through the bung-hole of the cask every time a draught is required.

"Caro signor, give a poor rogue a bajocch to get a draught of cold water!" is often the cry of the beggars in hot weather.

Thus refreshed, Santugo ordered his volunteers once more to march, and the road for our camp was resumed. After a short halt in the great forest, during noon, we reached the British forces, which still occupied their ground on the banks of the Mucato, where I had left them on the preceding evening. With much formality, I presented the Visconte and his companions to the general. The camp was already crowded with other volunteers, who came pouring in from all quarters, imploring arms and ammunition, and clamouring to be led against the enemy.

"Napoli! Napoli! Ferdinando nostro e la santa fede! Revenge or death!" was the shout of the Calabrians: it rang from the gorge of Orzamarzo to the cliffs of Capo di Larma; and all of the population who could draw a dagger, or wield an

ox-goad, rushed to arms, panting for vengeance. In less than two days, we had a corps of two thousand picked soldiers embodied, armed, equipped, eager for battle, and officered by the noblest families in the provinces. Clad in their white uniform,—until then there was a ludicrous want of similarity in their garb,—they appeared a fine-looking body of men, and every way the reverse of their countrymen of the Southern Provinces: brave, resolute, and yielding every requisite obedience to those Italian cavalieri whom the general appointed to lead them into the field.

The peasantry brought us in provisions in plenty, but refused to receive payment in return; saying that they "could not sufficiently reward those who came to free them from the hateful tyranny of the French," led by Massena, the renegade peasant of Nice.

On the night of the 3rd, I was despatched on the spur to the Podesta, or chief magistrate, of St. Eufemio, with a printed manifesto addressed by Sir John Stuart to the Italian people; inviting them to rise in arms, and throw off the yoke of France; promising them protection for their persons, property, laws, and religion; offering arms to the brave and loyal, and a free pardon to those whom Buonaparte had either seduced or terrified into temporary adherence to his brother Joseph.

Santuffo commanded the first battalion of the free corps; which was no sooner formed into something like fighting order, than we broke up our camp and moved to attack General Regnier; who, having been apprised of our debarkation, made a most rapid march from Reggio, collecting on the route all his detached corps, for the purpose of engaging us without delay.

On the evening of the 3rd, il Cavaliére del Castagno, a captain in Santugo's battalion, brought us intelligence that Regnier, at the head of 4,000 infantry, 300 cavalry, and four pieces of artillery, had taken up a position near Maida, a town ten miles distant from our camp, and that another corps of three regiments under the Marchese di Monteleone was en route to form a junction with him. These advices determined our leader to march at once on Regnier's position, and attack him ere the Marchese came up. Accordingly, four companies of Sir Louis de Watteville's regiment, under the command of Major Fisher, were left to protect our stores and a small field work which, under the direction of Signor Pietro Navarro of the Sicilian engineers, had been thrown up on our landing, and planted with cannon. Our little army marched next day (the 4th) in three brigades; which, together with the advance under Colonel Kempt, and a reserve of artillery with four six-pounders and two howitzers, under Major Le Moine, made barely five

thousand men, exclusive of the free corps.

CHAPTER VII.
THE BATTLE OF MAIDA.

The morning of the battle was one of the most beautiful and serene I ever beheld, even in Italy. As the curtain of night was drawn aside, and the bright beams of morning lighted up the giant masses of the Apennines, the green rice-fields, and luxuriant vineyards; white-walled towns and villages, solitary convents and feudal castles, waving woods, and the indentations of the rocky coast, all became tinted with their most pleasing hues. But the surpassing splendour of the sun—in whose joyous effulgence the whole glorious landscape seemed palpitating with delight—the clearness of the atmosphere, and the deep blue of the wondrous vault above us, were all forgotten, or unheeded: we thought only of the foe in position before us; while the dropping fire from our flankers, who had commenced skirmishing with the French tirailleurs, kept us keenly alive to the desperate work which had to be accomplished ere the sun sank below the sea. When that hour came, might I be alive to behold it? How many an eye that looked on its glorious rising, would then be closed for ever!

General Regnier's troops were encamped below Maida, on the face of a thickly-wooded hill, which sloped into the plain of St. Eufemio. The Amato, a river which, though fordable, has very muddy and marshy banks, ran along the front of his line, while his flanks were strengthened and defended by groves of laurel bushes, and a thick impervious underwood, which he had filled with scattered light troops. Cavaliére Castagno by his influence among the peasantry, obtained hourly any intelligence we required; and just before the battle begun, he conveyed to me, for the general's information, the unpleasing tidings, that Monteleone's corps, to the number of three thousand men, were now moving into position on the French right. General Regnier was now at the head of eight thousand bayonets, while we had little more than half that number, exclusive of the Calabrians, on whom, as yet, we could not rely much in the field; and they were, consequently, to form a corps of reserve: much to the annoyance of the gallant Santugo and his friends.

We marched in close column of subdivisions, parallel with the sea-shore, until we had nearly turned Regnier's left; and as our movements were all made

in a spacious plain, with the morning sun glaring on our serried ranks and burnished arms, he had an excellent view of our numbers and intentions. Had Regnier quietly maintained his position on the hill, we would soon have turned it altogether, and thus placed him between us and the sea; where Sir Sydney's squadron lay, broadside to the shore, with ports open and guns double shotted. To us the movement was full of peril: our retreat might be cut off; while, in consequence of the smallness of our force, the difficulties of access, and the natural strength of the ridge on which the enemy was posted, we should have found it no easy task to drive him back.

Whether the Frenchman feared he should be out-flanked, or was encouraged by his numbers to attack us, I know not; but he soon crossed the Amato, in order of battle, and moved his entire force into the plain, where his corps of cavalry—an arm, of which we were, most unfortunately, deficient—would act more effectively.

As yet, not a shot had been fired: the enemy continued advancing towards us steadily and in line; their arms flashing, colours fluttering in the breeze, and drums beating in sharp and measured time. They halted by sound of trumpet, and, at the head of a glittering staff, Regnier swept, at a gallop, from the right flank to the left.

"Gentlemen," said Sir John to his staff, on first observing this new movement of the enemy; "ride at full speed to the battalions, and order them to deploy into line. Mr. Lascelles, desire Cole to take up his ground where he is now. Dundas, you will direct Major Le Moine to get his guns into position on that knoll, where the wooden cross stands—to have them unlimbered, and ready to open on the enemy's line the moment he deems it within range. Order Lieutenant Colonel Kempt to throw forward the whole of his light infantry, double quick, and in extended order to "feel" the enemy, and keep their tirailleurs in check."

Saluting with one hand, I wheeled Cartouche round with the other, gave him the spur, and galloped on my mission; delivering the order to deploy into line as I passed the heads of the different columns. In three minutes Le Moine had his field-pieces at the appointed post, and wheeled round; the iron pintles drawn, the limbers cast off, and the muzzles pointed to the enemy. Leaping from his horse, he levelled, and fired the first shot himself.

It was the signal gun, announcing that the work of destruction and death had begun in grim, earnest. My heart beat thick and fast; every pulse quickened, and a proud, almost fierce and wild sensation, swelled within me, as the sharp report rang through the clear still air, and the white smoke floated away from the green knoll, revealing the dark cannon that bristled around it.

I reined up my gallant grey on an eminence, to watch the effect of the ball. General Regnier, escorted by fifty dragoons, their brass helmets and bright

swords flashing in the sun, was at that moment galloping back to his right flank; and on this group the shot took effect: a commotion was visible among them immediately, and they rode on at a quicker pace, leaving a dark heap behind them—a rider and his horse lay dying or dead. The whole of our field-pieces now opened a rapid cannonade on the French line, and continued it incessantly during the action.

By this time the light infantry were hotly engaged: the Sicilian volunteers, the Corsicans, and our provisional light battalion, were filling the dark-green underwood, and the leafy groves along the banks of the Amato, with smoke; while hill, rock, and woodland rang with the ceaseless patter of the fire they rained on the French tirailleurs, who blazed at them in return with equal spirit, from behind every screen afforded by the irregularity of the ground. As the lines drew nearer, the light troops, as if by tacit agreement, were withdrawn by sound of bugle; and by nine o'clock in the morning the battle had become general, from centre to flanks.

The corps which formed the right of our advanced line, was a provisional battalion commanded by Colonel Kempt, and composed of the light companies of six of our regiments from Sicily, and that of de Watteville's corps, with a hundred and fifty picked men of the 35th under Major Robinson. These troops were opposed to the 1st regiment of French light infantry (the favourite corps of the Emperor), which they mauled in glorious style; pouring in a deadly fire at about a hundred yards distance. On their left was the corps of General Ackland, composed of the 78th, or Ross-shire Highlanders, the 81st regiment, and five companies of de Watteville's, with the 58th under the late General Sir John Oswald, then colonel.

General Cole, with the provisional battalion of grenadiers, and the 27th, formed our left. Such was the disposition of our little army when engaging the enemy, whose force mustered almost two to one. Sir Sydney Smith by this time had taken a position with his ships and gun-boats, to act and co-operate if circumstances favoured; but, much to the annoyance of the gallant sailor, his fleet could yield us no assistance during that day's fighting.

Led by the chivalric Macleod of Geanies,—a brave officer, who afterwards fell in Egypt,—the 78th rushed upon the enemy, with the wild and headlong impetuosity of their countrymen. I was close by their dashing colonel, when, sword in hand, he led them on.

"Forward the Ross-shire buffs! Let them feel the bayonet—charge!" And animated to a sort of martial phrenzy by the shrill pibroch—whose wild and sonorous war-blast rang as loudly on the plain of Maida as ever it did by the glassy Loch-duich, when the bale-fires of the M'Kenzie blazed on continent and isle—the bold Highlanders flung themselves with a yell upon the masses of the

enemy. They were opposed to the French 42d regiment of grenadiers—a corps led by that brave French officer upon whom Buonaparte had bestowed the Calabrian title of Marchese di Monteleone. Riding in advance of his soldiers, by words and gestures the most enthusiastic, he urged them to advance, to keep together, to hold their ground. But his sabre was brandished, and the war-cry shouted, in vain; and vain, too, were the desperate efforts of his grenadiers before the tremendous charge of our Highlanders. Overwhelmed and broken, they were driven back in confusion, and pursued with slaughter by the 78th; until the latter were so far in advance of our whole line that Sir John sent me after them at full gallop, with an order to halt and re-form, in case of their being cut off.

I delivered the order to Macleod, who was stooping from his horse in the arms of a sergeant of his regiment, and almost unable to speak. A rifle-ball had passed through his breast, within an inch of the heart, inflicting a most severe and dangerous wound: yet he quitted not the field, but remained on horseback, and at the head of his Highlanders, during the remainder of the action, and the fierce pursuit which followed it.

Drumlugas, a captain of the corps, in the *melée* unhorsed the Marchese, who narrowly escaped with the loss of his steed and sabre: these remained the trophies of the victor, who distinguished himself by more conquests and captures ere the day was done.

Colonel Kempt's corps was now within a few yards of the enemy, and the deadly fire which they had been pouring upon each other was suspended, "as if by mutual agreement," as Sir John stated in his despatch; "and in close, compact order, and with awful silence, they advanced towards each other, until the bayonets began to cross. At this momentous crisis, the enemy became appalled; they broke, and endeavoured to fly; but it was too late: they were overtaken with most dreadful slaughter." Ere they fled—

"Dundas, ride to Brigadier-General Ackland; let him push forward his brave corps, and complete that which Kempt has so nobly begun!" cried the general. I departed with this order, on the spur; but it was anticipated by Ackland, who was already leading on in triumph, through clouds of smoke, and over heaps of dead and dying, the 78th and 81st: shoulder to shoulder, they rushed on, with bayonets levelled to the charge—cool, compact, and resolute. Discomfited by their formidable aspect, and the impetuosity of this movement, the whole of the French left wing gave way, and retired in confusion, leaving the plain strewn with killed and wounded. The river Amato was choked with the bodies and crimsoned with the blood of those who, unable by wounds or fatigue to cross the stream, became entangled among the thick sedges on its banks; where they perished miserably, either by the bayonets of the pursuers or by drowning.

At that moment a dashing French officer, at the head of three hundred

heavy dragoons, made a desperate attempt to retrieve the honour of France and the fortune of the day: rushing forward at full speed through the white clouds of rolling smoke, he attempted to turn the left of the 81st, and capture three field-pieces posted between that regiment and the Ross-shire Buffs.

"Allons, mes enfans! Napoleon! Napoleon! allons!" cried he, waving his sabre aloft. "Vive l'Empereur! Guerre à mort!" was the answering shout of his fierce troopers, as they swept onward in solid squadron; their brandished swords and long line of brass helmets gleaming in the sun, while their tricoloured Guideon and waving crests of black horse-hair danced on the passing breeze. But the steady fire of the Highlanders made them recoil obliquely, and I found myself most unexpectedly among them, when spurring onward with the order to Ackland: to deliver which with speed, I had the temerity to ride through a little hollow raked by the fire of the three guns already mentioned, and along which these dragoons had advanced unseen amid the smoke.

The press was tremendous: riders cursed and shrieked as they were thrown and trod to death; horses were plunging and kicking; and both fell fast on every side. Twenty swords at once gleamed around me, and their cuts whistled on every side, as I attempted desperately to break through the dense, heaving mass of men and horses. My heart leaped within me, my brain reeled, and my blood seemed on fire: I struck to the right, left, and rear, giving point and cut with the utmost rapidity; never attempting to ward off the flashing blades that played around my bare head—for my gay staff hat, with its red and white plume, had vanished in the melée. I must inevitably have been unhorsed and cut down, but for a sudden volley that was poured in point blank upon the cavalry from the dark brushwood covering one side of the gorge. A score of saddles were emptied, and many a strong horse and gallant rider rolled on the turf in the agonies of death; while all the survivors, save their officers alone, retreated at full gallop to the French position.

Next moment the whole line of the dashing 20th, led on by Lieutenant-colonel Ross, started out from their ambush in the thick underwood; where the regiment lay concealed during the smoke and confusion of the battle, unseen even by ourselves. Having only landed that morning from Messina, they had come up with our army during the heat of the contest; and Ross, observing the movement of the enemy's cavalry, threw his battalion into the thicket, the sudden flank-fire from which completely foiled their attempt upon our cannon. One man only of the 20th fell: but he was deeply regretted by the whole regiment—Captain Maclean (the son of Gilian Maclean of Scallecastle, in the Isle of Mull), an officer who had served with distinction in Holland, in the first expedition to Egypt, and elsewhere.

The Frenchman who had led on the dragoons seemed to be one of those

daring and reckless fellows who scorn flight, and laugh at danger; so, venting a malediction on his runaway troops, he rode alone towards me. The 20th and other corps near us, seeing that we were well matched, with a chivalric resolution to see fair play, suspended their fire to let us prove our mettle, while they looked on.

Being an expert swordsman, and master of my horse, so far that I could clear a five-barred gate or cross a hunting country with any man, I had but slight fear as to the issue of the encounter; yet it flashed upon my mind, that to be signally defeated in front of our whole army would be worse than death. My antagonist was about thirty years of age, with a form modelled like that of a young Hercules; and his aspect and bearing led me to conclude that the encounter would be a tough one. He belonged to the staff, and on his breast glittered the star of the Iron Crown of Lombardy: a badge bestowed upon five hundred knights (the flower of his officers) created by Napoleon on his recent coronation at Milan, as king of Italy.

We advanced within twelve yards of each other, and then rode our horses warily round in a circle; each watching the eyes and movements of the other, with stern caution and alert vigilance, such as the time and circumstances could alone draw forth: the life of one depended on the death of the other. At last I rushed furiously to the assault, making a cut seemingly at the head of my antagonist, but changing it adroitly to his bridle hand; the stroke missed the man, but cut through both curb and snaffle rein. I deemed him now completely at my mercy; but as he had a chain-rein attached to his bridle, nothing was gained by the first stroke.

"Monsieur, I disdain to return the compliment!" said he carelessly, while, with a laugh of triumphant scorn, he shook his strong chain-bridle. Provoked by his insolent non-chalance, I dealt a backward blow with such force and dexterity that he began to press me in turn; and with skill that I had some trouble in meeting. His charger was so well trained, that he was aided in every stroke and thrust by its movements; while Cartouche, startled by the clash of the sabres, began to snort and rear. The restless spirit of the fiery English blood-horse was roused, and a shell thrown by a French field howitzer exploding close by, completed his terror and my discomfiture: Cartouche plunged so fearfully that my sabre fell from my grasp, and I nearly lost my seat while endeavouring, by curb and caress, to reduce him to subjection. I was thus quite at the mercy of the Frenchman; who, generously disdaining to take the advantage that my restive horse gave him, merely said, "Gardez, monsieur!" and bowing, lowered the point of his sabre in salute and galloped away, greeted by a hearty cheer from the 20th

and Ackland's brigade.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COTTAGE ON THE MAIDA ROAD—THE EAGLE.

Broken by the impetuous and simultaneous advance of our brigades, Regnier's whole line of battle gave way, and retired from the field with precipitation—especially the left wing—leaving the position strewn with dead and wounded, and presenting a terrible scene of carnage and agony, as we pressed triumphantly forward. The right and centre retreated in tolerable order, covered by the cavalry; but the left was swept away and almost annihilated by the fierce charge of the Ross-shire Buffs. Our light battalion, commanded by Colonel Kempt, and Macleod with his regiment, flushed with victory, were ordered forward immediately in pursuit. They followed it up in double quick time for upwards of three miles, killing and capturing an immense number of the enemy; whose rear they galled by a continual fire from the eminences commanding their line of march.

When Sir John again sent me after them with an order to halt, I found them briskly engaged with a small band of fugitives who had thrown themselves into a little cottage by the wayside, over which a gigantic chestnut threw its ample shadow. From the garden wall and barricaded door and windows, the French maintained a spirited fire, to defend a standard and eagle which Regnier's son, a young sub-lieutenant, had carried in there instead of continuing his flight. This rural post was enveloped in the blaze of musketry and clouds of snow-white smoke: steel bayonets bristled above the green hedges, through which, and the shattered casements, red flashes broke incessantly; while fierce faces, pale with anger and chagrin, appeared at every opening.

"Shall I ride to Le Moine, to send up a four-pounder, and blow the place about their ears?" said I to Kempt.

"Cannon against a shelling!" exclaimed Macleod, backing his horse over the heaps of dead. "No, no; let the Buffs storm it. I will lead them on. Forward the Ross-shiremen!"

"Forward!" I added; "for the cavalry have halted, and seem disposed to return and engage. On, then, colonel; and a dozen of wine from the last officer over the wall!"

"CUIDICH'N RHI!" (the motto of the regiment), cried Macleod, dashing

spurs into his horse. "Charge, Seventy-eighth!"

A shout burst from the ranks, and the brave fellows rushed to closer conflict. I urged forward Cartouche, and the spirited horse shook the foam from his bit, as snorting and rearing up he bounded over the enclosure of the garden, and came down crash among the mass of Frenchmen, whose bayonets formed a steel hedge around me. I must have been destroyed in a moment, but for the strenuous exertions of Macleod and his gallant Buffs; who came pouring in at the gap my horse had made, and engaged the enemy hand to hand—fighting with that fierce and unconquerable ardour which has enabled those brave sons of the north to sweep all the troops of Europe before them.

I was not slow in seconding their efforts, and made good use of my sabre: one instant it descended upon musket barrels and bear-skin caps, and the next inflicted some deadly wound, which at that wild and exciting time was a matter of exulting triumph to me. Terrible were the bayonet wounds given and received in that short encounter; many poor fellows who were beaten to the earth were trodden to death beneath the hoofs of our horses, and in five minutes the defenders of the cottage surrendered. The walls without and within were piled up with dead and dying, and its once blooming garden was trodden flat, cumbered with bodies, and drenched with blood. But another desperate encounter was yet before me.

"The colours! the eagle!" exclaimed Macleod, breaking in amongst the prisoners; "where is the officer who bore the eagle?"

"Escaped, by Heaven!" answered Oliver Lascelles, who galloped up at that moment, and cleared the garden-wall at a flying leap. "There he goes on the bald-faced nag. A hundred to one the standard is lost!" A muttered exclamation of regret and mortification burst from us all on beholding the bearer of the eagle riding at full speed after the retreating cavalry.

"S'death!" cried Macleod, rushing to his horse; "he has escaped by the rear. Come on, gentlemen, we will have a steeple-chase for it!"

"Stole away! hark forward!" exclaimed Lascelles, with a reckless laugh, as his nag once more cleared the wall. The mounted officers all pushed onward at full gallop; but they were soon outstripped by my noble grey, which rapidly brought me up with the fugitive. On finding himself nearer the French rear-guard than the victors, and perhaps disdaining to fly from a single foe, young Regnier reined up on an eminence near the Amato, and with his sabre lashed by the knot to his wrist, with bent brows, and eyes flashing fire with determination, he awaited my onset. His horse was a small French trooper; the straight neck, drooping ears, and close flanks of which showed its inferiority of breed when compared with my high-headed, bold-eyed, and bluff-chested charger.

I charged him with such fury that both man and horse were almost over-

turned by the shock; and parrying his thrust, I dealt a blow which had certainly cleft his jaws, but for the thick brass scales of his shako. He was stunned, and reeled in his saddle for a moment, striking blindly and at random. At that instant the French cavalry trumpets sounded an *advance*, and I was compelled to press him more boldly than ever. Grasping the colour-staff with my bridle hand, the flag was nearly rent between us; while he endeavoured to hew off the eagle with his sabre. He glared at me like a tiger and cut fiercely at my left hand, which the twisted reins and thick military glove alone saved from being slashed off; but at the second blow his sabre turned in his grasp, and the blade was shivered into fragments on the stout ash-pole. In the heat of the moment, my sword was raised to cut him down: he was completely at my mercy. He was young, brave, and handsome. I remembered how his countryman had spared me but an hour before, and could I be less generous? Determined, however, to carry off the colours, I grasped him by the belt, placed my foot under his left stirrup, and hurled him to the ground on the other side. The moment he let go the staff, I struck spurs into my grey, and galloped off with the prize to our own troops; who had watched the combat from the eminence on which the contested cottage stood.

My heart bounded with exultation as I bore aloft the tricoloured trophy: it was so torn with shot and shell splinters, that we could never discover to what regiment it belonged. How different must have been the feelings of the poor sublieutenant, while borne off by the French cavalry; who, returning to the rescue, discharged their carbines after me: but I was happily beyond the range of their fire.

The battle was now completely over, and every hostile sound had died away. No trace now remained of all that gallant host, whose bayonets had flashed back the morning rays from the ridge of Maida, save the wounded and the dead: the distant glitter of arms and eddying clouds of dust, marked the route of columns hurrying in full retreat towards the shores of the Adriatic. Four thousand Frenchmen lay dead or wounded on the plain; exhibiting a melancholy picture of war and its attendant horrors—more especially on the day succeeding the action. A French account of the battle of St. Eufemio, as they style it, states that Regnier left fifteen hundred on the field; but we had substantial proofs that this number was far below the truth. Our own loss was trifling: one officer only was killed (Maclean of the 20th); but Major Hamil of the Maltese, and many others, lay severely wounded on the plain: our casualties, however, amounted to only three hundred and twenty-six. When riding towards our position, to present my trophy to the general, I had to pick my way with the utmost nicety, to avoid treading on the wounded; who filled the air with groans and ceaseless cries for "water!" as they lay unheeded, bleeding—too many of them to death—under a

blazing Italian sun.

The evening, like the morning, was serene and beautiful. The dense white smoke, which during the whole day enveloped the plain of Maida and overhung the dark forest of St. Eufemio, had now floated away to the distant sea. The volleying musketry and hollow thunder of the cannon awoke no more the echoes of the lofty hills, and the deep dingles of the woods: a mournful silence seemed to have succeeded to the roar, the turmoil and carnage of that eventful day,—eventful at least to those who witnessed and survived it.

It is a deplorable sight—when one is calm or suffering under a reaction of spirits so lately excited to the utmost stretch, and after the fierce tumult of a hot engagement has evaporated—to behold a vast plain bepuddled with human blood, and strewn with the bodies of men and horses, mingled with arms, broken cannon, splintered shells, balls half buried in the turf, shattered drums, and torn standards—on every hand, destruction, agony, and death; while ghastly piles of slain mark where the fiercest encounters have taken place. Alas! how changed the aspect of the gay young officer, or the stout and toil-worn veteran, when, shorn of their trappings, they lie weltering in blood—death glazing the eyes that have no kind hand to close them, and each yielding up his life like a dog in a ditch, unnoticed and unknown!

> —"The groan, the roll in dust, the all white eye
> Turned back within its socket,—these reward
> Your rank and file by thousands; while the rest
> May win, *perhaps*, a ribbon at the breast."

CHAPTER IX.

LIVES FOR DUCATS!—BIANCA D'ALFIERI.

The remains of General Regnier's army were now in fall retreat for Crotona, a seaport of Naples; harassed and galled by the Highlanders, and by the Free corps under the Duca di Bagnara and Cavalier del Castagno. The brigands and a host of armed peasantry also hovered like storm-clouds on their skirts; and all who fell to the rear, under wounds or fatigue, perished by that favourite Italian weapon—the knife.

On rejoining the main body of our army, I found the general in the highest

state of glee at the glorious success of the day: he was seated on horseback in the midst of the field, a holster-flap serving as his desk, writing a hurried despatch recounting our first regular brush with the enemy in Calabria. My arrival with the standard added a new and important paragraph to the general's missive. While he was complimenting and rallying me by turns, our interview was interrupted by cries of Frenchmen for succour, proceeding from a thicket close by. There I found six French officers, and the same number of soldiers, bound with cords to the trees, and surrounded by some of Santugo's free corps; who were hammering their flints and loading, with great deliberation, for the purpose of making targets of these unfortunates. Among the prisoners I recognised the gallant leader of the cavalry, whom I had encountered in the early part of the day. His arms were corded behind him round the trunk of an oak, and he was nearly blinded by the blood which flowed from a wound on his head, inflicted apparently by the butt of a musket, or the knob of a peasant's club.

"Save us, Monsieur Aide-de-camp!" cried he, in broken English; "these Italian ruffians know not the rules of nations, or the courtesy of war. Save us from such base poltroons! It is hard for brave men to die so helplessly."

"Giacomo—how now, rascal! Is this the way you mean to treat our prisoners?" I angrily asked of Santugo's follower, who seemed to be the officiating authority. "Unbind them instantly, and with these mule-headed rogues of yours, rejoin the free corps! But first, read to them the general's proclamation concerning the treatment of prisoners." As I severed the cords which bound the staff officer, the Calabrians vented their anger in loud murmurs.

"Eh, via! what would you do, signor?" asked Belloni, with an air of sulky surprise.

"Olà, damnazione!" growled the rest, as they grimly handled their knives, and closed round the Frenchmen; seemingly resolved that their prey should not escape. Poor fellows! it was an anxious moment for them. Taking from my sabretache a copy of Sir John's proclamation to the Calabrians, I read it aloud: it enjoined them to treat generously all captives who fell into their hands, and offered rewards for every one conducted by them in safety to the British camp—twenty ducats for an officer, and six for each private soldier. Immediately there arose a shout of "Il denaro—the money!" I cast the ducats (part of what I had won from Truffi the crookback) amongst them, with ill concealed impatience and scorn. The money was gathered up hurriedly, and the prisoners were unbound. Thus, for a hundred and fifty pieces of silver, I saved the lives of twelve human beings; who would have been butchered without remorse, but for my opportune arrival and intervention.

I led the reprieved men to Sir John Stuart, who was still intent on his despatch. Surrounded by whole hecatombs of slain and wounded—by sights and

sounds replete with agony and horror—the old soldier continued to scribble on "for the information of his Royal Highness," with an expression and air of as perfect coolness, as if seated in the most comfortable drawing-room at home. A group of adjutants and orderlies stood round him, reporting the various casualties, and making up their lists of killed, wounded, and missing. They fell back on our approach.

I presented the prisoners, among whom were an aide-de-camp, the lieutenant-colonel of a Swiss battalion, and my brave antagonist; whom I discovered to be the famous General Compere. He had been unhorsed and disarmed by Captain Drumlugas, who gave him in charge of the free corps; from whose gentle wardship I had rescued him. The privates were poor Swiss conscripts, who had been marched from their native mountains to fight under the eagles of the Emperor. They were placed among the rest of our prisoners, who now numbered about a thousand: these were formed in a solid square, and surrounded by the Sicilian battalion, with two four-pounders loaded with cannister and grape, to keep the forlorn band in complete subjection.

As I accompanied General Compere in search of a surgeon to dress his wound, we passed a deep trench, or natural chasm of rock, in which about seven hundred French dead were being hastily interred; to prevent their bodies producing malaria, or being stripped and mutilated by the peasantry. A wing of les chasseurs Brittaniques, working with their jackets off, were performing the duty of sextons. Compere paused to observe them.

"Poor fellows!" said he, looking down on the heaped dead within that hideous catacomb. "This morning, how merrily they marched from Maida! How many a young and brave heart, that was then swelling with courage and ardour, is lying here—crushed, cold, and still!" His fine, bronzed face, clouded for a moment with the deepest dejection and mortification, while surveying the ghastly trench where his soldiers lay piled one on another, with arms, knapsacks, and harness, just as they were found; but his proud eye brightened as he turned towards the darkening hills, where the far-off clouds of dust, curling like smoke in the distance, marked the line of Regnier's quick retreat.

"Hah!" added he, gaily, "France yet swarms with brave soldiers; and Massena will soon show your haughty general that Naples is not to be won and lost on Maida only. He is 'the child of victory;' and fortune will soon smile again on the soldiers of the emperor. As for this day's field, about which they will doubtless make a great noise in England—poh! 'tis a mere battle of eggshells to what I have seen: even in Italy—this land of cowards! Had you been on the fields of Arcole and Lodi—had you seen our victorious legions sweep the Romans from the mountains of Imola—'twould have done your heart good. Faith! one who has captured Naples, fought in Apulia, invested Gaeta, and seen the corpses piled

chin-deep in the redoubt of San Andero, must know what campaigning is! But allons! Monsieur; if it please you, let me get my poor broken head dressed." I hailed one of the medical staff (Dr. Macneisa of ours) who was passing near us, and in a few minutes Compere's wound was bathed and bandaged up, with a care and tenderness of which he seemed deeply sensible.

Macneisa had scarcely retired, when we were informed that the numerous prisoners had become refractory, and Sir John was about to give them a dose from the field-pieces; but Compere hastened to the spot, and by his presence reduced them to subjection. They were then formed in sections, and strongly escorted, preparatory to their march to the coast, where the boats of Sir Sydney's fleet were in waiting to embark them.

"En arriere—marche!" cried the crest-fallen Compere, half-forgetting that his authority was no more; and the dark, disarmed mass moved off towards the sea, encircled by a hedge of glittering bayonets. "Dieu vous benisse!" said the French general, raising his cocked hat; "Monsieur aide-de-camp, I shall never forget your kindness. Adieu—a thousand adieux!" And I saw him no more—at least, not as a prisoner.

On their retreat to Crotona, the French were closely followed by Macleod with the 78th, les chasseurs Brittaniques, and Santugo's free corps, with orders to attack them on every occasion, and to endeavour to dislodge them entirely from Calabria Ulteriore. As their route lay along the shore of the Adriatic, an excellent opportunity was afforded for an effectual co-operation with our squadron in that sea, commanded by Captain (afterwards Sir William) Hoste; who never neglected an opportunity of galling their left flank whenever it came within range. On their right a giant chain of mountains heaved upwards from the beach; and there the chiefs of the Masse, at the head of thousands panting for French blood, hovered in clouds, while Macleod pressed on their rear. For miles the shore was strewn with their killed and wounded. A position was hastily taken up at Catanzaro; but as hastily abandoned, before the overwhelming power of the Masse.

Our wounded were conveyed to St. Eufemio, where all the officers of the medical staff and fleet were in attendance on them daily. The solicitude of the sailors to be of use to us, and their anxiety to assist their wounded countrymen—the alacrity with which they brought supplies ashore—and the general tenderness and attention with which these rough tars treated their helpless brethren, elicited the highest encomiums from the general and the admiral; on board whose ship I had the honour to lodge the eagle (captured at Maida), which, with our despatches, was immediately transmitted to London in charge of Lieutenant Villiers of ours. Sir John wished me to have been the bearer; but, having cogent reasons for remaining in Calabria as long as possible, I contrived to excuse myself.

Our head-quarters were established at St. Eufemio; while Macleod, with three thousand men, laid siege to Crotona, and Hoste, with the Adriatic fleet of gun-boats, blockaded it by sea. Colonel Oswald was despatched to invest Scylla, with orders to storm the castle of Monteleone on his way. These were the only strongholds of importance possessed by Regnier in the lower province. Immediately on his retreat, the famous Capo-bandito Francatripa, with his ferocious horde issued from the forest of St. Eufemio, and carried by storm a battlemented and palisadoed house at the place called the Sauveria; where an unfortunate party of the 23d French light infantry, who formed its garrison, had been abandoned by Regnier in his flight. After a gallant resistance, the garrison were all cruelly massacred by these blood-thirsty patriots; even their little trumpeter, a boy only twelve years of age, perished beneath their poniards. Such a sample of Italian savagism called forth the indignation of our soldiers, who were well aware that by the courtesy of war the little band deserved very different treatment; but Francatripa excused himself on the plea that it was but a part of that cruel system of reprisals maintained on both sides.

When the embarkation of prisoners, the landing of cannon and stores, the billetting of sick and wounded, the burial of the dead, and all the bustle succeeding the battle were over, I thought of paying a visit to my friends at the villa d'Alfieri. There could not be a better time; the Visconte was at Crotona with his regiment, and I should have Bianca to myself.

My billet was at an inn of St. Eufemio, called "Il Concha d'Oro," from its sign, the Golden Shell. It was kept by a worthy bustling little Italian, Maestro Matteo Buzzone: who, in truth, was not ill named; his paunch being one of the first amplitude. I was enjoying a cigar and a decanter of iced Malvasia from the classic isles of Lipari, at an open lattice. Opposite, stood the house of the Signor Podesta, and I amused myself for some time by attempting to engage his daughter, a dark-eyed and red-cheeked damsel, in a flirtation: but my efforts were vain; though she appeared every moment at the window—watering flowers, arranging and disarranging the sunshade, bowing to a passer by, or what not.

The coolness of the evening induced me to think of a canter as far as the villa d'Alfieri. Summoning the groom, I desired him to saddle Cartouche; while, with rather more care than usual, I made my toilet: for I was about to pay my devoirs to the fair Bianca. In those days, when one was not on duty, the uniform coat was worn open, with the lappelles buttoned back, to show the facings barred with silver; the sash and swordbelt being worn under it, and over a white kerseymere waistcoat. White breeches, long jackboots reaching above the knee, and equipped with jangling spurs, a heavy sabre with a brass sheath, buff gloves, and a cocked hat with a drooping plume of scarlet and white feathers, completed the uniform of a British staff officer.

I was just setting forth, when the ill-omened visage of the general's orderly, an old and sunburnt serjeant of the 81st, appeared at the door: erect as a ramrod, he raised his hand to his bear-skin cap, and placed a despatch in my hand.

"Hallo, Pierce! what's fresh now?"

"Sir John's compliments, sir, and he requests you will make all speed with this before the night sets in."

"Now, by all the gods! 'tis mere slavery this staff work—I'll resign, and join the 62d at Syracuse!" I muttered, while tearing open the note accompanying the dispatch—an oblong document, addressed "O.H.M.S., To Lt.-Col. Macleod, Ross-shire Buffs, Crotona."

"Dear Dundas (ran the note), You will ride forthwith, and deliver the accompanying letter at Crotona. If it suits your taste, stay there to partake of the fighting; but bring me word the moment it capitulates. Yours, &c.,

"JOHN STUART, Maj.-Gen."

There was no course but to obey: yet I determined that my original purpose of visiting Bianca should not be interfered with. Thrusting the despatch into the sabretache, I buckled on my sabre, and in five minutes was en route, with all the worldly goods I possessed (at least in Calabria) strapped to the saddle before and behind me. In front were a pair of excellent pistols, newly oiled, flinted and loaded, and my blue cloak was rolled and buckled over the holsters; a valise was strapped behind me, containing a few changes of linen, and a fighting jacket: a handful of cigars and an Army List, a horse-picker and a cork-screw, with a copy of "The Eighteen Manoeuvres" (compiled by my namesake Sir David Dundas), completed my camp equipage; the whole of our heavy baggage having been left behind us in Sicily. The telescope—an appendage indispensable to a staff-officer—I carried in a pipe-clayed case, slung across my left shoulder.

Evening had almost given place to night when I arrived at the villa, and dismounted. Its ample façade was shrouded in gloom, and there were no signs of animation within; which was accounted for by the absence of Santugo, with all his dependents. I fastened my horse in the porch, for there was no one to receive it: the guard-room of the sbirri, or armed militia (which all the feudal nobles maintained until the French invasion), was empty, and the quadrangle deserted. In remote places on the mountains some residences were still garrisoned or protected by the sbirri; and the landholders, abetted by these armed followers in their hereditary and inveterate feuds, became the perpetrators of outrages and atrocities of every kind.

In the vestibule I met Annina, a girl of Capri, and Bianca's favourite atten-

dant; who, on beholding me, uttered an exclamation of delight: this was a good omen. I enquired of course for the Viscontessa, and was informed that she was away to the prince's conversazione at Nicastro, accompanied by the old Major Gismondo; but the Signora Bianca was at home, and, taking my hand, the frank Italian girl bade me accompany her. With my clattering boots, buckskin gloves, and worn accoutrements, I was in fitter trim for the march than for a lady's boudoir: but though my scarlet uniform, its embroidery and silver epaulettes, were faded and dingy, still they were quite service-like; and the coat yet showed the stains of blood from the wound I had received at Cefalu, and the scratch in the skirmish near St. Eufemio.

Bianca was seated at a table, leaning her cheek upon her hand, intent on the sorrowful pages of "La Guiletta," her glossy curls clustering over her white arm, which the fashion of her country revealed to the dimpled elbow. The lamp by which she sat reading (a globe of light, upheld by a silver Atlas) shed its radiance full upon her eyes, which flashed brilliantly as she raised them on my entrance, with an expression in which surprise, confusion, and welcome were blended. Good omen the second! thought I. One is more apt to be egotistical when on the staff, than when doing duty as a mere regimental officer. The momentary flush which suffused her soft cheek and pale forehead, heightened her rare beauty; and at the moment when she arose, and threw back the rich masses of half-disordered curls with her white hand, her bust resplendent in the full glare of light, she seemed perfectly divine—in the language of her countrymen, a *Bell'idolo*.

Her constant companion, Luisa Gismondo, rising from an embroidery frame, received me with a smile of welcome: she, too, was an enchanting girl, though much shorter in stature than Bianca; and never did the light of a candelabrum shine on curls more glossy, lips more rosy, softer blue eyes, or a face more brilliantly fair than poor Luisa's.

"O joy!" exclaimed the girls together; "and so, signor, you have escaped the awful day at Maida?"

"Yes, ladies; and I hope to escape many more such days. I trust you will excuse this somewhat unseasonable visit, Signora Bianca," said I, slightly pressing her hand; "but being ordered off on the spur to Crotona, I have taken the liberty of visiting you, to be the bearer of any message or letters to Monsignore Luigi."

"How very kind of you, Signor Claude; but—but you do not proceed on the road to Crotona to-night?"

"I must, indeed, ride forward without delay; and believe me the general, kind-hearted though he be, would scarcely excuse my having made a detour, even to visit the Villa D'Alfieri."

"O, Signor Claude, consider the state of the country!" said she earnestly, as I seated myself at the other end of the sofa, evincing not the least hurry in the

world.

"'Consider the nature of the service,' the general would reply; but I believe that the wildest bandit in Italy—not even Francatripa, or Frà Diavolo—would molest a British soldier."

"You, perhaps, trust them too far. But, indeed, our oppressed people are not quite so bad as the Parisian papers have represented them."

By this time the distance between us on the sofa was greatly diminished, and I was about to say something very pointed and gallant, when Annina entered with a tray of refreshments, which she placed on the ebony table before us. I saw a cunning smile twinkling in her black eyes as she watched us, while arranging the ices, the crystal goblets, and a superbly embossed caraffa of the wine of Gioja—a village of Calabria, famed for the excellence of its grapes. The Viscontessa was, as I have said, at Nicastro, where, I heartily hoped, she would continue to enjoy herself; not wishing my tête-a-tête with these two charming girls to be interrupted by her presence, or that of the Major.

"O, signor, tell us how you captured the standard at Maida?" asked Luisa.

Well aware how much such an encounter makes one shine in the estimation of women, I briefly related the whole affair; deriving considerable satisfaction from the expressions of horror, pity, and surprise, that flitted in succession across the fair faces of the listeners.

"And so you escaped unhurt!" exclaimed Bianca clasping her hands—with delight I was fain to suppose.

"Quite, signora: you observe my thick glove, and the curb rein—"

"And the bearer—the poor Frenchman!" said Luisa, fixing her blue eyes upon me.

"Escaped, I am now happy to say. Poor fellow! 'tis said he was Regnier's son."

"Phillipe Regnier! O my God!" murmured Luisa in a breathless voice.

"Luisa!" exclaimed Bianca, surveying her pale features with astonishment. The poor girl blushed deeply, and bent over her embroidery frame, adding, in a faltering voice, that she herself was soon to behold such scenes, and looked forward to them with horror.

"True, Luisa, dear," said Bianca, kissing her cheek, "You set out with your father for our army at Cassano to-morrow."

"To join the chiefs of the Masse?" I asked. Luisa Gismondo bowed, and the subject was abruptly changed. I saw that some secret was labouring in her breast; causing a dejection and confusion she could ill conceal.

But to proceed, briefly. The acquaintance that Bianca and I had formed in Sicily was fast ripening, and we became as intimate as cousins; and quite as harmless in our flirtation. Swiftly and happily passed that agreeable evening, in

the course of which I discovered that the minds of these fair girls were no way inferior to the perfection of their persons. Their manners were animated and bewitching, their imaginations brilliant; each was mistress of music and drawing, and well read in the best works of Italian literature. We commented on the "Giuletta" of Captain Luigi da Porta—that brave cavalry officer, who wielded his pen in peace as well as he had done the sword in the wars of the league of Cambray and the campaigns of Gradiska; and from whose pathetic novel, Shakspeare derived the plot of his far-famed tragedy. We also dipped into the "Gierusalemme" of Tasso, and wooed the softer muse of Petrarch. Then Luisa seated herself at the piano, and with Bianca sang a beautiful duet from the "Antonio e Cleopatra," of the amorous Vittorio D'Alfieri; whose genius enriched and invigorated the literature of his country. Bianca showed me her portfolio, wherein I sketched the distant hills of Maida, as seen from the casement, shining in all the silvery blaze of an Italian moonlight: next came her collection of medals and bronzes; and her music, including the last new piece from Palermo. Her lap-dogs, parrot, and heaven knows what besides, were all separately admired; while the general, his dispatch, and the service were alike forgotten.

The boudoir was a charming little place; elegantly fitted up and decorated with every ornament that her own taste or her cousin's wealth could procure; and the cool sea-breeze wafted the aromatic perfumes of the garden through the open casements. The broad moon was shining on the glassy deep, and we heard the solemn hymn of the Sicilian fishermen, and the dipping of oars as they fell in measured time into the sparkling waters of the gulf.

The sullen toll from the clock turret in the quadrangle, warned me that it wanted but an hour of midnight. I started up as the forgotten dispatch rushed upon my remembrance.

"The deuce!" thought I; "now then to horse and away."

Bianca set before me in grim array all the dangers of travelling in so wild a country at midnight—the woods, the marshes, the wolves, the banditti; and begged me to remain at least until her aunt returned with some of the mounted servants. The fine eyes of the lovely and warm-hearted girl became almost suffused with tears, as she presented me with an Agnus Dei for Luigi. This was a piece of some unknown stuff cut in the form of a heart, which Fra Adriano had informed her had power to drive away evil spirits and calm storms, and tempests; having been consecrated by his holiness the Pope, who provides an ample supply of these sacred toys for distribution every seven years. Although at that moment I was on the point of leaving her, perhaps for ever, I could not forbear smiling at the credulous superstition or devout simplicity which induced her to entrust me, in such sincere good faith, with this gift for her cousin.

"Felicissima notte, Signorina Luisa, and happiest night to you, dearest

Bianca!" said I on turning to leave them.

"I would give you such an amulet too," said Bianca, "but 'twere better not: you only scoff at these things, which your erring fathers have taught you to scorn."

"No, dear Bianca; believe me that any gift—"

"Hush now, Caro Claude!" said she, placing her pretty hand on my mouth; "I will not believe you."

In one short evening how had the enchanting manner, the gentle tones and sweet nature of this Italian girl endeared her to me! Until I rose unwillingly to depart, I knew not that the spell she had cast around me was so powerful. My hand trembled; and this sympathetic confusion was conveyed by its touch to Bianca; who blushed and cast down her eyes, while a roguish smile overspread the fair face of Luisa. A love affair makes rapid progress in the fervid clime of volcanoes and earthquakes, though the pathway is too often planted with poniards; and before parting, Bianca and I had formally exchanged rings. Respectfully pressing my lips to her hand and cheek, I resigned her, in tears, to the tender solace of Luisa Gismondo, and hastened from the apartment. I led forth poor Cartouche, who had spent the whole night in the dark porch shaking his ears and snorting with impatience, while the cold night dew gathered on his glossy coat and glittering harness.

My foot was in the stirrup, when the opening of a window above made me pause, and my fair friends appeared leaning over a balcony.

"Claude," said Bianca; "on the wild hills above Maida there dwells an aged hermit, to whom every year we have sent alms—madonna mia! he is very, very old! My aunt did so when she was a girl, and her mother had done so before her. Tell the good man that I remember him in my prayers, and ask his blessing for Bianca."

"And for me, too, signor," added Luisa.

"I shall not forget, ladies," said I, leaping into my saddle. "Adieu."

In ten minutes the Villa d'Alfieri was far behind, and I was galloping along the moonlit beach of St. Eufemio.

CHAPTER X.

A NIGHT WITH THE ZINGARI.

An hour's hard riding brought me to the skirts of the great forest; so famous as the haunt of wolves and brigands, that I did not feel perfectly at ease in its vicinity, and kept on the alert as I proceeded. On one side stretched away into obscurity the level shore, bordered by the sea; which rolled its sullen waves on the yellow sand, or dashed them in glittering foam against the jutting rocks: on the other, arose the rustling oaks and beeches of the lofty forest, the long dark vistas and gloomy recesses of which the sun had never penetrated. From the wooded heights I expected every moment to issue the red flash of a rifle, or the glancing weapons and tall conical hats of Francatripa's horde; but I trusted that my character as an Italian ally, would gain me some favour with those desperadoes—whose ferocity, strange to say, was often mingled with the highest spirit of patriotism and chivalry.

A dense cloud obscured the radiant moon, casting a long dark shadow over sea and land, and I missed the beaten track which supplied the place of a road. Presently, Cartouche sank to the girths in a plantation of rice, where he snorted and plunged furiously. By using bridle and spur with the utmost caution, I extricated him; but he sank again and again, and I had fears of losing my noble grey altogether. A rice field is little better than a marsh, full of water and holes. I toiled on for half an hour, holding his bridle and endeavouring to regain the lost road; but every instant we plunged deeper into bogs and pools of stagnant water. At last I regained terra firma, close to the forest: but was exhausted with over-exertion and want of sleep. Then the warnings of Bianca were remembered, and I regretted not having remained all night at the villa.

On the verge of the forest, and close to the preceptory house of Castelermo—a ruin overgrown with vine and ivy, and now brilliantly illuminated by the moon, which broke forth with double splendour—I came suddenly upon a large blazing fire, that lit up the dark arcades of the wood, and hissed as the dew was shaken from the waving branches on the flames. Around it moved a group of people, whom at first I supposed to be brigands, but on nearer approach I found they were Zingari—a class half gipsies half robbers; of unknown origin, and speaking Italian, but with an accent peculiar to themselves. Like all the scattered remnants of this mysterious tribe in other countries, the Zingari wander over the face of the land without possessing any property save the chattels borne in the panniers of their mules and asses. These vagrants are chiefly employed in working on metals, which they manufacture into rude stilettos, buckles, and bodkins; though they live principally by their wits, and the nimbleness of their fingers.

On my approach, the male portion of the community snatched up their knives and poles; and a skirmish might have ensued, had not an old man, who appeared to be their capo, or chief, quieted their clamour, and stepped forward to

receive me. The gang consisted of twelve men and the same number of women; all of them clad in a gaudy, though miserable manner.

The old Zingaro had a beard like that of a patriarch, and the thick masses of his grizzled hair were confined in a netted bag—the only covering his head perhaps had ever known. His red cotton breeches and deer-skin jacket were worn to tatters, and his brawny brown legs were bare below the knee, his feet being encased in sandals, laced with straps above the ankle; a broad belt encircled his waist, and sustained a knife, a flask, a pouch, and a mandolin, which, with a staff or ashen pole, six feet long, completed his equipment. The younger vagabonds were all attired much in the same manner; their dark glancing eyes, naked limbs and shoulders, wild tangled hair, and wolf-skin garments, giving them, a very savage or satyr-like aspect.

Believing there was no cause to fear these people, and being willing to rest and gratify my curiosity, I dismounted, and returned ceremoniously the greeting of the venerable capo.

"Cross her hand with a ducat of gold, that Zilla may read your fortune, signor gentiluomo!" said a young girl, dancing round me, and snapping her castanets, while a gipsy struck a few notes on a rude guitar, and chanted the Zingaresca. "Touch my hand with gold, and if your love will be successful, I will read it in the stars."

"I would rather have it read from your own bright eyes, my pretty donzella," said I, with a gallant air. This made the eyes of the young rogue with the guitar flash fire; and on my attempting to take the hand of the girl, she tripped away from me with a demure air of rustic coquetry which made her look prettier still. Though not tall, she was finely formed: the contour of her head and profile was of classic beauty. Her eyes were darker than any I had ever looked on, and at times they became lustrous with lambent light; and her teeth, white and regular, were unsurpassed in brilliancy even by those of Bianca. But her face, her arms, and legs—the latter partially displayed by a scanty petticoat—were burned by the sun to a hue considerably darker than the natural olive tint of her race. Her hair was so black, that it seemed of a *blue* tint, where the light struck upon it, and its luxuriant masses were confined by a golden arrow, with an unexpanded bulb; announcing that she was a maiden spotless and free: the *barb* being the sign of betrothal or marriage.

"Gentil signor, for a crown, I will write you a spell that will make all the women love you."

"Benissimo, my girl!" said I, "if only one woman loves me truly"——

"Or seek you a love potion? or a charm against French bullets?" said a hideous hag, with fierce black eyes, a shrivelled skin, and the aspect of a Hecate.

"Bah!" growled the old Zingaro; "away with you, Zilla—and you, too, good

mother! The cavaliere has not come among us to have charms made, or fortunes read; but for a trusty guide, who for a handful of carlini will conduct him through any part of the woods between seas."

"Right, master Zingaro!—a guide is just what I am in search of, to direct me on the Crotona road: at least, so far as we may go until dawn; when I may see to avoid these cursed rice-fields and quagmires, through which it is no joke to ride in the dark."

"True, signor: you have had a very narrow escape. I remember that in the wet season, when these marshes become lakes, three of Regnier's dragoons, while escorting the famous crook-back, Gaspare Truffi, to the gallows at Monteleone, were cajoled by his oily tongue, and led among the rice-fields yonder, as the shortest way. Via! 't was the longest road they ever marched—for they are on it yet. Gaspare escaped; but the troopers and their horses sunk for ever in the shifting morass. You may thank those blessed stars that shone so kindly on you: you had perished but for them. Seat yourself on the turf, signor: the Zingari feast when other men sleep; and if you will condescend to partake of our meal"——I bowed assent, and seated myself beside his daughter.

It would have been wiser to have ridden on my way, with or without a guide, rather than have trusted myself in such quarters and company; but the aspect of the whole group was so strikingly romantic, that I was tempted to linger. The red flames of the fire cast fitful and lurid gleams of light on the dark countenances and wild garments of the wanderers, shedding a fiery glow on the rich green foliage of the gigantic oaks and elms, whose gnarled trunks were interlaced with ivy, vine, and olive. No wind poured through the long, still vistas of the forest; whose gloomy recesses were spangled with myriads of fire-flies, flitting like flames of fairy tapers. A mountain torrent was falling near us; and the roaring hiss of the cascade seemed alone to stir the dewy leaves of the umbrageous foliage. The large eyes of the Zingari were glinting in the light, as they stared fixedly on the red embers, or watched the motions of the aged crone who superintended the cooking. The meal—whether late supper or early breakfast, I know not—consisted of sundry portions of roebuck and wild pig, which were broiling and sputtering merrily on the glowing bars of an immense gridiron. To these savoury viands were added cakes of flour, a jar of boiled rice, and a pitcher of the wine of the country. Close by me stood Cartouche, reined up to the lower branch of an oak; his large and prominent eyes glaring in the light of the fire, and his broad, red nostrils quivering as the smoke curled around them.

This was one of those picturesque scenes of service, which are rendered so pleasant by the very contrast they present to others. Two hours before I had been seated in a superb boudoir, beside Bianca and her friend; now I lounged on the grass among unshaven thieves and vagrants, who regarded my rich uniform

and well-trimmed mustachios with eyes of ill-concealed admiration and wonder.

During this midnight revel, the old capo represented the roads about the forest, as being so dangerous, that I resolved to abide with his band until dawn, when he promised to send a guide with me so far as I wished.

"Besides, Excellenza," he added, "Francatripa's men are in the forest, and you might be in some peril if you fell into their hands alone: while under my protection you are safe. I mean not that the noble Francatripa would in person molest you; but there are those in his band who are less scrupulous, and who care not whether a traveller wears the scarlet uniform of Britain, or the blue of my Lord Peppo: especially that crooked fiend, Gaspare Truffi, who, since the massacre of his own gang by the voltigeurs of the Marchese di Monteleone, acts as Signor Francatripa's lieutenant."

As day light could not be far distant I consented to remain. Rolled up in my cloak, I lay down to sleep by the feet of my horse; while the Zingari, after posting one of their gang to watch, also composed themselves for repose on the green sward.

The novelty of my situation, the character of my companions, and my late happy interview with Bianca, kept floating before me, chasing away sleep, and compelling me for a time to lie awake. I lay watching a gigantic tarantella—a species of spider well known for the venomous nature of its bite—spinning its net of silvery gauze from the branches of the oak above me. But I soon found a more agreeable object for contemplation, in the classic form of Zilla; who lay near me, sleeping on her father's mantle of undressed deer-skin, over which her unbound ringlets rolled in luxuriant profusion. At last I dropped into a half slumber, but was speedily aroused by something writhing within my cloak. I threw it open, and lo! a bloated viper of enormous size was coiled round my left arm. While I endeavoured in vain to shake it off, an exclamation of disgust escaped me, which awoke the young girl Zilla; who, on beholding my predicament, fearlessly grasped the throat of the venomous reptile, and tossed it with all her strength among the trees. This action recalled the lines in Virgil's Third Georgic—

> "In fair Calabria's woods a snake is bred,
> With curling crest and with advancing head;
> Waving he rolls, and makes a winding track:
> His belly spotted, burnished is his back."

"Signor, do not be alarmed!" said Zilla; "I hope the horrid thing has not bitten you? Ah, were you to sleep for a single night where I have often slept, in the sedges by the Lake of Lugano, at the base of Mont Salvador, where the surface

of the water and all the fields around it swarm with vipers, you would not be so frightened by one."

"I was not frightened, my gentil Zingara, though certainly a little startled."

"Pardon me, Excellenza—I meant not that; but—but only that I am so happy to have been of service." She paused with something like embarrassment.

She was so beautiful that I was half ashamed to offer her money; and on my placing a Venetian sequin in her hand, strange to say, it was with the utmost reluctance, and after many a furtive glance at the snoring capo, that this half-clad gipsy girl accepted the gift. So I kissed each of her dimpled cheeks—a soldier-like mode of payment, which she evidently relished much more: the sequin seemed only the bestowal of a charity, but the kiss was a compliment. Her oriental eyes kindled with vivacity and light, equalled only by those of the young Zingaro, her admirer; whom I observed coiled up close by, like a snake in a bush, and watching us with a keen expression of anger and mistrust, that boded me little good-will.

"And so, for this night, I am the rival of a Zingaro—a beggarly gipsy boy!" thought I, resigning myself once more to slumber; "what a dashing intrigue for an aide-de-camp! And yet the girl is pretty enough to turn the heads of our whole mess."

I tossed and turned restlessly on my grassy bed. In vain I invoked sleep: a dreamy sense of danger kept me awake, although I had a long and hard ride before me at daybreak. At last I fell into a dozing stupor, produced by the capo's wine and the dampness of his bivouac.

I was roused to consciousness by a shriek from Zilla—a piercing cry—which brought the whole Zingari on their legs in an instant; and springing up, I grasped my sabre. The hideous visage of Gaspare Truffi, lit up by the dying embers, scowled at me for a moment, from among the pale green foliage of an orange tree; we then heard him bounding away with one of his elvish yells of spite and malice.

"Slay him—slay him! O the hideous crook-back," exclaimed Zilla. "Caro Signor, I watched while you slept, and saw him stealing near you like a tiger-cat. He had a dagger in his hand, and his look was deadly: I knew his fell intentions."

"Olà Zingari!" shouted the enraged capo; "up Mosé—up Maldo—away—after him with your knives and poles!"

"A hundred ducats for him, dead or alive!" I exclaimed.

"Cowards!" ejaculated the old capo. But no man stirred in pursuit: the lieutenant of Francatripa was not to be pursued and attacked like an ordinary outlaw. The gang hung their heads and drew back.

My exasperation was only equalled by my astonishment at this re-appearance of the hunchback; who, I had supposed, must have perished in the whirlpool beneath the Villa d'Alfieri. My rage was kindled anew by this third at-

tempt to assassinate me; and had he fallen into my hands at that moment, I should certainly have incapacitated him from making another attempt on my life.

As a longer stay with my new acquaintances in such a vicinity seemed likely to be fraught with other troubles and dangers, I mounted and rode off; accompanied by a little boy, the brother of Zillah. To her I tendered my thanks and purse at parting: but what gold could ever repay the debt of gratitude I owed the poor gipsy girl? She had saved my life. I thought less of it then than I have done since; one's existence is in hourly peril when campaigning, and escapes from danger are matters of much less note in warfare than in a time of peace.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HUNCHBACK AGAIN.

In a little while day dawned, and all the splendour of an Italian sunrise lit up the scenery. The waning moon shone pale and dim as, fading, it disappeared in the azure sky. From the lofty hills I had a view of the Mediterranean; its bright surface gleamed like a sea of polished glass, throwing out in strong relief the dark frigates anchored in the gulf, the gaudy xebecques with their broad lateen sails, swift feluccas, oared galleys, and a swarm of little coasting vessels. These seas, nevertheless, were at times infested by French cruisers and Algerine corsairs; who, darting from behind some cape or isle, pounced upon the unwary merchantman: for this tribe of Mussulman pirates had not then been extirpated or subdued.

As I advanced, fields of rice, of Turkey corn, and even sugar-canes appeared at intervals among the wooded hills; and the road-way was bordered by laurels, myrtles and mulberry trees. A few cottages with picturesque little mills turned by natural cascades, peeped out from among groves of the orange and plum-tree; and ridgy mountains, over whose tall summits the sun poured down his lustre, bounded the landscape. As the sun ascended higher into the blue vault, and his heat and brilliance increased, the scenery became involved in a hazy silver mist, which floated over the face of nature like a veil of the finest gauze, softening and subduing the vivid and varied tints: it was denser on the mountains; from whose giant sides vast volumes of white vapour came rolling down, like avalanches or foaming cascades, into the valleys below.

The wild and rugged nature of the country, and my ignorance of the local-

ities, caused me to progress but slowly. When passing through lonely places, I met more than one scout belonging to various bands of brigands, watching, rifle in hand among the rocks, and exchanging signals by imitating the scream of the owl, the yell of the lynx, or the caw of the rook; but they always greeted me by a wave of the hat, and a cry of "A holy day to you, signor!" permitting me to pass without question. In many of these desert places the wayside was strewn with the dead bodies of French soldiers who had perished from wounds or exhaustion. By this route some of Monteleone's brigade had retreated, and many of the poor stragglers lay in ghastly groups around the rude wooden crosses, (marking the scene of murder) and stone fountains so common by the road-side in Italy. They had been stripped—and some perhaps despatched by the poniards of the plunderers; many were torn by wild beasts, and all were in a loathsome state of decay, lying unburied, blackening and sweltering under a burning sun.

A long ride over rough ground brought me to Policastro. Wearied with so long a seat on horseback under such intense heat, and feeling a langour caused by the hot south wind which had blown all day, I gladly halted at the first albergo that appeared.

Policastro was all in a bustle: the people were holding a festival in honour of St. Eufemio, their patron saint. It was with the utmost difficulty I found quarters in a miserable inn, where I fed and dressed Cartouche with my own hands, while such humble fare as the place afforded was in course of preparation.

The signoressa was very sorry—but the town was in such a bustle, she hoped "Excellenza" would condescend to take what her house afforded—maccheroni, lardo, bread and fruit, with Gioja wine.

"Maladetto!" said I with no very contented air, "let me have the best, signora."

This indifferent repast was soon dismissed, the table cleared, and fruit and wine brought in. Lighting a cigar I drew a sofa close to the open window, and lounged there, observing the fair, or merrymaking, held in honour of the sainted Eufemio. Laces, silver buttons, ribbons, chaplets of beads, knives and bodkins, gaudy pictures of miracles and the madonna, skins of bucks and wolves, real or imaginary relics of holy personages who died in the odour of sanctity, rags, rotten bones, teeth, and innumerable pieces of the true cross, were offered for sale by various ecclesiastics and pious rogues who kept stalls; the first for the benefit of the saint, and the last for their own. Warm choke-priest, pastry, and sour wine (the refuse of the convent cellars) were retailed for the same purposes. Flags waved, and garlands and ribands fluttered on every side; bells were tolling, and men carolling; and women and children were dancing and singing round a richly-attired image of Saint Eufemio, as large as life, erected on the identical spot from which that blessed personage ascended to heaven. Dominicans, Minorites,

Servites, Trinitarians, Clerks of Madonna, and I know not how many more of the Padri, with shaven scalps, dark cowls, or shovel hats, clad in sombre tunics girt with cords of discipline, swarmed in the streets.

All this festivity displayed the harmless devotion of the Italian character, and its peculiar superstitions; but among the mountains eastward of the town, I became acquainted with deeds of atrocity which revealed all its blacker traits—its proneness to revenge and bloodshed.

"Love," says a popular writer, "is a fiery and a fierce passion everywhere; but we who live in a more favoured land know very little of the terrible effects it sometimes causes, and the bloody tragedies which it has a thousand times produced, where the heart of man is uncontrolled by reason or religion, and his blood is heated into a fever by the burning sun that glows in the heaven above his head." Of this I had many instances during our short campaign among the wild Calabrians.

On entering a little hamlet at the base of the hills which rise between Policastro and Crotona, I found that a marriage had just been celebrated; and all the inhabitants of the place were making merry on the occasion. Rustic tables were spread under the shade of orange-trees; and baked meats, rice, milk, fruit, and other simple viands, were displayed in profusion. The happy peasants welcomed me joyously, and invited me to tarry for a time and partake of the general festivity. I dismounted; and was led forward by a crowd of rustics to the place of honour beside the most respected guest—the parrocchiano, a venerable and silver-haired brother of San Francesco, who had just united the young couple.

After touching our glasses and tasting the wine, we stood up to observe the dancers, who were performing one of their spirited national measures, to the music of the tabor, the flute, and zampogna. The bridegroom, a stout and handsome woodman, arrayed in gala attire—a particoloured jacket, scarlet vest, and green breeches; the knees of which, like his conical hat, were gaily decorated with knots of ribbons—was dancing with his bride, little dreaming that a malignant rival scowled from the orangery close beside them. As usual, the bride was the object of greatest interest; she possessed beauty of form, delicacy of feature, and a soft Madonna-like expression of serenity and modesty which, set off by her smart Italian costume, rendered her quite bewitching. A piece of white linen was folded square on her head, and fell with a fringed edge over her shoulders, half concealing the heavy braids of ebon hair through which shone the gilt arrow, whose bulb would to-morrow be expanded. Large dark, but downcast eyes, a small rosy mouth, and dimpled chin, and a beautiful bosom, were among those charms with which the woodman's bride was gifted—doubtless, her only dower. The old people clapped their hands; while the younger sang her praises, accompanied with the music of flutes and mandolins.

The measure was the provincial tarantella; one which requires the utmost agility, the movements increasing in rapidity as the dance approaches its termination. At the moment when the music was loudest, and the joy of the dancers and revellers at its height, the sharp report of a rifle-shot, fired from the orangery, startled the joyous throng; a wild shrieking laugh was heard, and the unhappy bride fell dead at the feet of her husband!

"Ahi! Madonna mia! la sposa!" burst from every tongue; then all stood for a moment mute—transfixed with horror.

The woodman uttered a yell of rage and grief, and unsheathing his knife, plunged into the thicket with the aspect and fury of a tiger. Then rose shouts of anger.

"Oh, abomination! 't is Truffi, the devil—Gaspare, the hunchback! Malediction and revenge!" The men scattered in pursuit of the assassin, armed with knives, clubs, ox-goads, and such weapons as they could snatch on the instant; leaving the old Franciscan and women on their knees lamenting over the hapless victim of revenge, thus cruelly cut off when her young and buoyant heart was bounding with love and joy.

"Gaspare!" I ejaculated, leaping on my horse to join in the pursuit; "is this devil everywhere? Can this gnome of the woods be dogging my footsteps? Could this death-shot have been intended for me?"

But the Franciscan informed me that the cripple had been a disappointed suitor, and that, ugly and venomous as he was, this overgrown reptile professed love for the village girl, and had made a solemn vow of vengeance on the woodman. I was exasperated beyond measure at this deplorable outrage, and assisted in the fruitless pursuit as long as it was possible for me to do so, consistently with the general's order. Finding that I had far outstripped the villagers and was alone among the mountains, I turned my horse's head eastward, and pursued my journey: not consoled by the recollection that deeds as dark were committed in the wild county of Tipperary when I was quartered there.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HERMITAGE.

Reflecting on the recent catastrophe, I rode for some time absorbed in mournful thought, from which I was aroused by the peculiar sound of Cartouche's hoofs

ringing on hard pavement. On looking about, and finding that I was riding over some old Roman way, the aged hermit, whom the young ladies had requested me to visit, came to my remembrance: for in answer to my inquiries at Policastro, as to his residence, I had been informed that a causeway of unknown antiquity led to his hermitage.

Evening was fast approaching; and after entering a narrow wooded valley between two lofty hills, I found the gloom increasing rapidly. The clouds, too, were gathering fast; a few large drops of rain plashed heavily on the tossing leaves; while a faint gleam of lightning, and the muttering of distant thunder announced an approaching storm. I now looked somewhat anxiously for the dwelling of the recluse; and pursuing the windings of that ancient way—which, perhaps, in former days had echoed to the sandalled feet of Milo's mighty host—I penetrated yet further into the deep valley. Stupendous oaks clothed the darkening hills, and cast a sable and melancholy gloom around. The solitude was awful; the stillness intense: for it was scarcely broken by a brawling torrent, rushing, red and muddy, over a precipice of jagged rock, and resounding in a deep and echoing chasm. Afar off, on the most distant peaks, flickered the blaze of vast furnaces kindled by charcoal burners; but soon these fires were quenched by the fury of the rising storm, and broad sheets of lightning, with vivid and ghastly glare lit earth and sky almost incessantly. By the livid flashes I was enabled to find my way to the hermitage, and pushing forward at full gallop I gladly reached its welcome shelter.

A rough wooden cross, and a turf-seat beside a rock, from which bubbled a rill into a basin worn by the water (that had fallen for ages, perhaps) on the stones below, answered the description given me of the abode of this recluse of the wilderness. Dismounting, I approached a small edifice of stone, which appeared to be the ruined tomb of some ancient Roman; whose name once great and glorious, was now lost in oblivion. Its form was square, its size about twelve feet each way, and it had a domed roof of massive stone-work, which was covered with ivy and myrtle, while wild fuchsias and wall-flowers flourished in the clefts and joints of the decayed masonry. Two Roman columns and an entablature, time-worn and mutilated, formed the portico, which was closed by a rustic door of rough-barked wood. On the architrave I could just make out this inscription, cut in ancient characters,

SIT TIBI TERRA LEVIS;

the wish uttered at the funerals of the Latins, that earth might press lightly on the person buried. I, therefore, concluded that the edifice had been erected anterior to the custom of burning the dead.

Fastening my horse in a sheltered nook, between the tomb and a rock that rose perpendicularly behind it, I knocked thrice at the door; but not receiving an answer, I pushed it open and entered. The light of a lamp, placed in a recess before an image of the Madonna, glimmered like a star amid the darkness of that dreary habitation, and just enabled me to perceive, on my eyes becoming accustomed to the gloom, a most melancholy object; one not unlike that which presented itself to the reprobate Don Raphael and his friend among the mountains of Cuença.

On a bed of leaves and straw, stretched on the paved floor, and clad in the coarse canvass garb of the poorest order of priesthood, lay the venerable hermit. The hand of death pressed heavily on him. His cassock, rent and torn in twenty places, scarcely covered his almost fleshless form; which age, fasting, and maceration had attenuated to a frightful degree. A rusty chain, evidence of some self-imposed penance, encircled his waist; and he convulsively clasped in his bony and shrunken hands a rosary. Close by lay an old drinking horn and a human skull: the latter well polished by long use; and near them lay a handful of chestnuts, the remains of his last repast.

"O thou most adorable Virgin!" he exclaimed, in a feeble but piercing voice, "in this terrible hour intercede for me with Him whom I dare not address: for horribly the awful memory of the past arises at this moment before me! Gesù Cristo, hear me! and thou blessed Madonna!"

His voice died away, and I approached gently, removing my hat on drawing near.

"A foot!" he exclaimed. "Oh, stranger! for the love of mercy give me a draught of water! Thirst makes me suffer in anticipation those pains which are in store for sinners such as I am!"

His drinking cup was empty, so I hastened to the brook and filled it with water: the storm was roaring terrifically through the valley at that moment. Hurrying back, I fastened the door, and pouring a few drops of brandy from my travelling flask into the water, held the cup to the sufferer's lips; who, after drinking greedily, sank again on his couch. A faint flush spread over his death-pale face; he revived rapidly, and endeavoured to raise himself up into a sitting posture; but in vain: nature was exhausted. After trimming the lamp, by its smoky light I took a closer survey of the tomb and its scarcely living tenant. The dismal aspect of the place—its dark walls and darker urn-niches—the feeble light and heavy sombre shadows, together with its wretched inmate, filled me with wonder, disgust, and pity.

The face and figure of the hermit were such as I never saw before, and have never looked on since. He was a very old man—old beyond any one I had ever known; and he seemed to have hovered so long on the brink of the grave—lingering between time and eternity—that he looked (if one may be allowed the

expression) a living corpse, almost as much a part of the next world as of this. The crown of his head was bald, but tangled locks of white hair straggled from his temples, and mingling with his beard, formed one matted mass, white as snow, growing together, and almost concealing his visage, and reaching below his rusty girdle. It gave a patriarchal dignity to his appearance. His keen and sunken eyes gleamed beneath his white and bushy eyebrows, with a most unpleasant expression; like the horrid glare of death, mingling with the restless and rolling glances of insanity.

To disturb him as little as possible by the appearance of my uniform, I wrapped my cloak round me, and, seated on a stone near his couch of leaves, waited until he revived so far as to address me. Refreshed by the cool draught, and invigorated by the spirit it contained, his energies were rallying rapidly: yet I did not think he would live out the night. The tempest that raged furiously without, made yet more impressive the silence within the tomb: a silence broken only by the heavy breathing and indistinct muttering of the sufferer.

Sweeping over the drenched wilderness, the rain was pouring down like a cascade on the vaulted roof of the catacomb; the swollen torrent roared over the adjacent rocks; the rushing wind howled through the narrow glen, and the woods reverberated the rattling peals of thunder. Ever and anon the electric fluid sheeted the sky with livid flame, shewing the dark masses of fleeting vapour, and lighting up the doorway and the broken niche that served for a window, so as to reveal the wild landscape—the woods waving tumultuously like a surge, the strained trees tossing their branches to the blast, and the dark hills beyond, whose peaks the thunderbolts were shattering in their fury.

The storm lulled for a moment; and but for a moment only! Again the rolling thunder pealed, slowly and sublimely in the distance; echoing athwart the vault of heaven like platoons of musketry. The roar of the elements increased as the storm rushed onward, till at length it burst anew over the valley, as if to spend its concentrated fury on that lonely tomb. A succession of stunning reports, each one loud as the roar of a hundred pieces of cannon, shook the dome and the walls of the tomb to their foundations; some fragments of masonry fell to the earth, and I leaped towards the door, fearing to be buried in the falling ruin. But the tomb withstood the bursting tempest, as it had done thousands of others.

The old man, uplifting his clasped hands and gleaming eyes to heaven, shrieked wildly a prayer in Latin. His aspect was awful: he seemed the embodied spirit of the tempest—which now died away more suddenly than it rose. The dust was yet falling from the shaken roof and walls of the tomb when the storm ceased.

"'Twas the voice of God in wrath!" exclaimed the hermit, in a firm and solemn voice. "Stranger, would that thou wert a priest to implore for me the

intercession of the blessed Mary, mother of all compassion! to pray with me in this dread hour. Prayer! prayer! much need have I of prayer to soothe the terrors of my parting soul!"

I was deeply impressed by this appalling scene. The accents of the dying man were faltering, and full of anguish: he spoke as if eternity had opened to his mental vision.

"More than a hundred years have rolled away since I first looked on the light of this world—*Miserere mei, Domine*! Sixty years only have I spent in prayer, penance, solitude, and mortification of the flesh; to atone in some degree for the manifold and deadly sins committed while a denizen of the great and wicked community of mankind. You behold a sinner," he continued, his voice rising as he proceeded—"a villain of no ordinary dye! A wretch, whose enormities are greater than sixty years of piety and repentance can atone for: long though they have been. Centuries seem to have elapsed since this dismal tomb of the wilderness first became the witness of my secret sorrow—since I last heard the din of the bad and busy world! How many of the brave, the beautiful, and the innocent have been gathered to their fathers in that weary time! Generations have been born, have lived their allotted span, and been called to their last account: yet this guilty head has been spared. Memory, with all its goading torments, has never left me; though the torpid apathy of age and a life of solitude—sixty slowly passing years spent in brooding over past horrors, and the crimes of early days—have worn and withered to the core, a heart which for swelling pride and ferocity had not its equal in Italy. Who would think *this* hand had ever grasped a sword?"

He laughed like a serpent hissing, and thrust before me his right hand: lean, bony, and wrinkled, the large joints protruded beneath the thin shrivelled skin, which revealed every vein, muscle, and fibre. His skeleton form was so covered with hair, that he resembled an overgrown baboon; and as he regarded me with a wild and intense stare, his red and sunken eyes sparkled like those of a Skye terrier through the tangled bush of white locks overhanging them.

"Men say I have been mad!" he continued: "I might well have been so, if bodily torture and mental agony, incessant and acute, can unseat the lofty mind which alone makes man godlike! In this dread hour, the memories of other years—deeds of anger and crime, thoughts of sorrow and remorse—come crowding fast upon me! *O miserere mei, Domine!*" He seemed talking to himself rather than to me, and often pressed his bony fingers on his sharp angular temples, as if trying to arrange the chaos of recollections.

"Blessed be Madonna, that she sent a fellow mortal to witness these last agonies—to behold the deathbed of a sinner! Let its memory be treasured up in your heart—profit by it, my son! One death-scene such as this is better than a thousand homilies."

(*This* to me, who but two days before had ridden through the carnage of Maida!)

"You are young, and I am old, my son—old in years, and older still in sin: yet say; think you there is any hope for me? In another hour I shall have passed from this transient life to that which is eternal. What will become of my soul? Will He consume me in his wrath? O Spirito Santo, thou alone can answer! I behold that flaming abyss of everlasting misery and woe, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. Is that my doom? *O miserere mei, Domine*! Mercy! pity me! speak!"

While raving thus, he clasped my feet with the energy of despair; his whole frame shook with excess of spiritual terror, and his eyes seemed bursting from their sockets. Deeply moved, I heard him in silence, not knowing what to reply. A long pause ensued.

"Holy father!" said I, when the paroxysm had passed away, "there is hope in the mercy of Heaven even for the vilest, how much more for one who has passed so holy a life as you!"

"Alas! alas!" he exclaimed, beating his breast, "thou knowest me not, my son! And the simple peasantry who regard me as a saint—even like the holy Gennaro—know me not!"

"Whatever may be those crimes the recollection of which so haunts you, let us hope that remorse and sincere repentance——"

"Blessed words! You say truly, my son! Remorse and repentance will do much: but a load of guilt weighs heavy upon my soul. I would fain unburthen my conscience to thee, my son: though the recital of my iniquities might freeze the marrow in your bones. Receive my last confession, I beseech thee; for I would not go down to the grave with the reputation of a saint: which, though given me by many, I merit so little!"

Again he drank thirstily; and raising himself into a half-recumbent posture, prepared to make that revelation for which my excited curiosity longed so impatiently. He was rallying rapidly; his voice became fuller, and his enunciation more distinct and connected. He clutched my arm with an iron grasp, and his bleared and hollow eyes glittering with excitement, glared into mine with a searching and intense expression, which made me feel very far from comfortable.

"You would preach to me words of peace and consolation—peace to a tempest-tost heart—consolation to a soul torn with anguish and remorse! You bid me hope! Listen, then, to what mortal ears have never heard—the long concealed secret of my life—the crimes of my heedless youth, and the sorrows of Diomida: who perhaps, from the side of Madonna in heaven, beholds this scene to-night."

Gathering all his energies, the aged recluse commenced the following nar-

ration, in the solemn subdued tone of a contrite sinner recounting his misdeeds; recalling with a vividness that seemed preternatural in one so near his end, the history of his youth.

His narrative was often interrupted by pauses, bursts of sorrow, and groans of remorse, exclamations of pity and horror, pious ejaculations, and prayers for mercy.

Exhausting as this suffering and exertion must have been, he seemed to gain strength as he proceeded; as if all his powers returned to accomplish this last effort: so the flame of the expiring lamp burns bright for a moment ere it is extinguished.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HERMIT'S CONFESSION.

Of all the nobles of Venice, none enjoyed a more general and deserved popularity than Giulio Count della Torre di Fana. The gayest and most gallant of cavaliers, loved by his friends and respected by his enemies, he was the star of the senate, and idol of the people. His wife was beautiful and virtuous; his estates were among the richest, his palaces the most superb, his stud the most fleet and graceful, his assemblies and gondolas the most elegant, and his galleries the most magnificent in Venice! What more was wanting to make him the happiest man in Italy?

At the age of twenty Count Giulio espoused Diomida, the niece of John di Cornaro the venerable Doge, then in the 84th year of his age; preferring her to an heiress of the powerful house of Strazoldi, to whom he had been in childhood betrothed. Diomida was then in her seventeenth year, and her beauty not less than|her exalted rank, made her the first lady in Venice. Her mind was not inferior to her charms, which were such as man rarely looks on. O Diomida! even at this distant time, when the silent tomb has so long closed over thee—aye, even now, when looking back through the long dark vista of years of horror, I can recall to memory thy lovely sweetness and majestic beauty: true attributes of thy blood and high descent, which made thee the noble glory of Venetians!

For a time after his marriage no man was happier than Count Giulio, and no woman more loving or beloved than Diomida. Proud of each other, their mutual tenderness and devotion appeared to increase every day, and their happiness

became a proverb among their friends. If the count returned ruffled in temper by losses at the gaming table, by debates in the senate, by any obstruction opposed to the passage of his gondola on the canal or his train on the steps of the Rialto, the soft voice and gentle smile of Diomida were sure to soothe his fiery spirit; which was easily chafed by trifles into a fury. At the sound of her voice or the pressure of her little hand, the gloom vanished from his haughty brow, and the annoyance was forgotten: Diomida was formed for love and delight, and anger fled from her presence. The count doted on the noble girl whom he had taken to his bosom, and enthroned in his palace: his affection had no equal save her own. His innocent bride was supremely happy; giddy with joys that were too bright to last. She saw not the storm that was gathering in the distance, and which, urged by the power of her evil genius, was so soon to overwhelm her.

The young Count di Strazoldi—who had been serving under Zondodari, Grand Master of Malta, and had gained considerable renown in the war against the Ottoman Porte—arrived in Venice, six months after Giulio, at the altar of Sta. Maria della Salute, had placed on the bright tresses of Diomida that coronet which ought to have adorned the sister of Strazoldi.

Like all the Venetian nobles, the Count di Strazoldi was fierce, haughty, and infatuated with his family rank; and being naturally of a libertine disposition, his residence among the knights of San Giovani—whose loose mode of life is proverbial—did not improve his morals. The wild cavaliers and reckless military spirits with whom he had associated, in the garrisons of La Valetta and Melita, had altogether destroyed the little sense of honour which a Venetian education had left uncorrupted; and he returned, a perfect devil in heart, though assuming the frank air of a soldier, and the graceful manners of an accomplished cavalier. When flushed with wine, however, his features had a stern expression, and his restless eyes a daring look, that quiet men shrunk from; and he then looked more like a debauched and brutal bravo, than a polished Venetian gentleman.

Lucretia, his sister, to whom La Torre had preferred the gentle and timid Diomida, was the most imperious and haughty signora in the duchy; notwithstanding the exquisite softness imparted to her brilliant charms by the Lombardo blood of her race. Fired at the preference of La Torre for the beautiful Cornaro, her love turned to the deadliest hatred; and she demanded of her brother Stefano to challenge La Torre to a duel on the Bialto. But Count Strazoldi was tired of fighting: he had seen enough of it under the banner of Malta, and in the valley of the demons in Sicily, under the Marquiss de Leda, and was not disposed hastily to enter into this feud at the behest of his incensed sister.

"Patience and peace," said he, with a grim smile. "I will anon avenge you more surely and amply."

He had met the Count della Torre at the Dogale palace, at the gaming

houses, and other public places, and found him a gay agreeable young man, upon whose generosity and frankness of heart he had little doubt of imposing; and from whose princely revenue he hoped to repay himself for the ducats he had squandered in the Turkish wars, and among his wild companions at Malta and Gozzo. The Count della Torre was in turn pleased with the gay and fashionable manners of the hollow-hearted Stefano Strazoldi; who first gained his esteem by losing some hundred sequins with an air of unconcern, and performing a few pretended acts of friendship. Strazoldi afterwards won the admiration of Della Torre, by relating the battles, sieges, and fierce contests by sea and land in which he had borne a conspicuous part, while serving under Zondodari and the grand cross Antonio Manuel de Vilhena; who, on the death of the former, succeeded him in the office of Grand Master.

Although La Torre made a constant companion of the dissolute Stefano, and dissipated his patrimony in gay entertainments, he had more prudence than to invite him to his palace. His unhappy countess mourned in loneliness the sad change in the manners of her husband; who, led astray from the path of honour, spent whole days at the gaming house, and nights at the café or the cantina. He associated also with other reckless spirits, to whom Strazoldi introduced him, in visiting those thrifty mothers who had rising families of daughters, and who were anxious to procure them dowries according to the infamous custom of that abandoned city. In short, Count Giulio was no longer the same man he had been, and days passed without his crossing the threshold of his wife's apartment. Poor Diomida! this terrible change sank deeply in her heart. When during the day her husband at times visited the palace, it was only to extort money from his terrified steward; who warned him in vain that the splendid revenue of his estates was miserably impaired. But palled with excesses, jaded in spirit, and morose with losses, such answers only chafed the count into a tempest of rage; and the steward was glad to raise the gold, by having recourse to Isaac the famous Jew-broker on the Rialto.

Seldom now did he look on the pale face of his once loved Diomida, whose silent sorrow—she was too gentle to upbraid—passed unheeded. Her grief was increased to agony when she learned that in the society of her dangerous rival Lucretia, the count now spent the most of his time: the passers-by shrugged their shoulders when they beheld the vast façade of the palazzo della Torre so silent, gloomy, and dark—having the air of a deserted mansion—while the gorgeous palazzi of the Strazoldi, the Cornaro, the Balbi, and other nobles, were blazing with light, and brilliant with festive assemblies.

One evening, full of sad thoughts, Diomida sat in her boudoir alone: alas! she was now seldom otherwise. Her cheek was pale; the slight roseate tinge that once suffused it had fled, and the lustre of her eye had faded. Long weeping and

pining in secret were destroying that fresh bloom, which rendered her the most admired of all Venetian beauties, and the pride of the venerable Doge, her uncle. Her books, embroidery, and guitar were all neglected; and she sat moodily in her dimly lighted room, watching in despairing anxiety for the tread of her husband (whom for four days she had not seen), and weeping for the past joys of their early marriage days.

As she listened, step after step rang in the adjacent streets, and heavy spurs jangled beneath the paved arcades: other men were passing to their homes, but the count returned not to his; and the thoroughfares gradually became silent and empty. The clock in the marble cupola of Santa Maria tolled the hour of midnight, and the Countess bowed down her fair head in wretchedness: she knew that her husband would be absent for another night, and she would rather have known that he was dead than in company with her triumphant rival, or damsels of still more doubtful fame. She was about to summon her attendants previous to retiring, when the dash of oars broke the silence of the canal, and a gondola jarred with hollow sound on the steps of Istrian marble leading from the portals of the palace. A flush of hope glowed on the pallid cheek of Diomida, and listening intently, she pressed her hand on her fluttering heart. In breathless expectation she paused, listening to the measured tread of manly footsteps approaching, marked by the ring of silver spurs on the tessellated floor of hall and vestibule, and a sword clattering in unison, as the wearer ascended the lofty stairs by three steps at a time. A hand cased in a long buff glove drew back the ancient hangings of the doorway—

"Giulio! Giulio—beloved one—you have not quite forgotten me!" exclaimed Diomida in piercing accents, as she sprang forward to embrace her truant husband. She was caught in the arms of Stefano Strazoldi!

"Excellent, my beautiful idol!" he exclaimed, pressing the sinking girl to his breast; "you are somewhat free for a Doge's niece, but not the less welcome to a joyous cavalier, tired of the timid Ionian girls and copper-coloured nymphs of Malta, with their cursed Arabic tongues!" and he laughed boisterously. His broad-plumed hat placed on one side of his head, revealed the sinister aspect of his face, now flushed with wine and premeditated insolence; his cloak, doublet, and rich sword-belt were all awry, and Diomida beheld with dismay that he staggered with intoxication.

"I thought you were the Count Giulio, my husband," said Diomida, shrinking back with horror; for she could not look upon Strazoldi, the destroyer of her domestic peace, otherwise than as an accomplished demon.

"Unhand me, my lord!" she added indignantly. "I am a lady of noble birth, and shall not be treated thus with impunity!"

"Nay!" exclaimed Stefano; "do not ruffle your temper, sweet lady: our mar-

ried dames of Venice heed little when their cheeks are pressed by other lips than those of their liege lords. Why, my beautiful idol! thou art as coy and enchanting as Elmina la Mondana, the fairest priestess of Venus——"

"Infamous!" exclaimed the struggling countess, trembling with terror and indignation. "Darest thou name such in my presence?"

"Aye, in presence of Madonna; and why not to thee?"

"I am the daughter of Paolo Cornaro, the first of our Venetian cavaliers, before whose galley the bravest ships of the Mussulmen have fled. Alas! were he now alive, I had not been thus at thy mercy! Unhand me, Count Strazoldi! Away, ruffian——"

"The prettiest little chatterbox in Venice!" said the Count gaily. "But enough of this! Know that your loving lord and master has assigned you to me, for the sum of three thousand sequins, fairly won from him an hour ago at cards in the house of the Mondana; therefore art thou mine, signora, as this paper will testify." The swaggering libertine grasped firmer the shrinking girl with one hand, while with the other he displayed a paper, to which she saw with horror Giulio's name attached. A glance served to inform her that the contents were such as her assailant had described them to be. La Torre, intoxicated with wine, and maddened by losses, had staked and lost his beautiful wife for the sum of three thousand sequins, to his reckless companion; who, hurrying away from the side of La Mondana, threw himself into his gondola, and reaching the palace of the Countess, had ascended to her apartment by the private stair: the key to the entrance of which, he had obtained from the depraved husband. Diomida trembled with shame and indignation, and would have swooned; but the revolting expression in the gloating eyes of Strazoldi, inspired her with the courage of desperation: she shrieked wildly, invoking the Madonna to protect her, as Stefano, inflamed by her beauty, and encouraged by her helplessness, was proceeding to greater violence.

"Peace, pretty fool," he exclaimed in a hoarse whisper, "or I will twist this scarf round your throat, as I have done to many a less noisy damsel in the land of the Turk and Greek. Sformato! have I not gained you fairly at Faro from your husband, and offered him my sister Lucretia, in exchange? Silence woman! wouldst thou force me to gag thee with my poniard! Beware, 'tis of Campoforte." The ruffian laughed fiercely, and grasped her with a stern air of determination, while she redoubled her despairing cries for assistance. But, alas! the palace was empty now; and the few attendants sleeping in the basement heard her not. She was about to sink from exhaustion, when steps were heard springing up the private staircase. She exclaimed with passionate joy—

"'Tis the Count! 'tis my husband! O Giulio, save your once-loved Diomida, before she expires at your feet!"

It was not La Torre, but a tall and richly clad cavalier wearing the uniform of the Dalmatian Guards, and having a black velvet mask on his face, as if he had just left a masquerade.

"Draw, Count Stefano! Ungallant ruffian! whose vices in peace obscure all the brilliant feats performed in war. Defend yourself."

Strazoldi drew promptly, while Diomida overcome, sank upon a sofa almost lifeless.

Fierce was the conflict that ensued between the cavaliers, who were both armed with those long narrow bladed and basket-Lilted rapiers, then usually worn by Italian gentlemen. Strazoldi, brave to excess, fought as resolutely in a bad cause, as he could have done in a good one, and the stranger was compelled to put forth his best skill. Both were perfect masters of their weapons; but Strazoldi had youth and agility in his favour. While his antagonist managed his sword with all the stern deliberation and coolness of a practised duellist, the fierce Stefano lunged forward, thrusting furiously, until by a sudden circular parry, his weapon was struck from his hand, and whirled up to the frescoed ceiling. His adversary rushed upon him, beat him to the floor, and placing a foot upon his neck, commanded him to ask pardon or die.

"Of the Countess I ask pardon most assuredly, but not of you!" replied the vanquished libertine, panting with rage. "Strike, whoever you are! Stefano di Strazoldi—who has ridden through the thickest battalions of the Turks, and planted the standard of Manuel de Vilhena on the summit of the Castello Roso—will never ask mercy of mortal man!"

"I esteem you brave among all the nobles of Venice; and, reckless libertine and ruffian as you are, would regret to slay you. Once more, I ask, will Count Stefano of Strazoldi yield?"

"Never!"

"Not to *me*?"

"No; not were you the Doge himself."

"That shall be proved," replied his conqueror, removing his velvet mask, and revealing the noble features of the venerable John Cornaro; his brow contracted and stern, and his large dark eyes flashing with anger and indignation.

"Oh spare him, spare him, guilty though he be!" exclaimed the Countess.

"You know me, Count Strazoldi; and will not scorn to beg life as a boon at the hand of your Doge?"

"Doge or devil! Di Strazoldi will never submit to any such humiliation," replied the reckless cavalier: startled, but not abashed, on discovering his conqueror to be the illustrious uncle of Diomida. "Strike! illustrissimo, but keep me not in a position so degrading!"

Cornaro raised his hand, yet stayed the impending thrust, and spared his

adversary.

"Rise, signor; receive your sword, and learn to use it in a better cause than the defence of guilt and outrage. Rise and begone! John Cornaro can respect bravery even in a ruffian. Away! but remember this affair ends not here. Both with Count Giulio and yourself a stern reckoning must be made. I swear by San Marco! that this right hand, which never suffered insult to pass unrevenged or wrong unpunished, shall, without appeal to council or to senate, redress most amply the outrage offered to the child of my brother. Wretch! save such as you, every man in Venice would have respected the daughter of Paolo Cornaro, the bravest admiral that ever led the fleets of our republic to battle. Begone to the infamous Giulio! You know his haunts, at the house of Signora Elmina, or any other bordello where he wastes his ducats and his days. Let him know of this night's work, and tell him to dread the vengeance of John Cornaro!"

Strazoldi retired covered with confusion. The tall and imposing form of the venerable Doge, whose breast swelled with anger and whose eyes kindled with indignation, made him quail. Fierce and profligate as he was, Stefano knew that he was wrong; and his natural effrontery failed him before the virtuous wrath of the incensed Doge, whose generosity added a sting to this stern rebuke. Leaving Diomida, who had swooned, to the care of her women, Cornaro departed; resolving to call the Count della Torre, and his unworthy cousin Strazoldi, to a severe account at a future time. But the Doge returned to his palace only to sicken and to die; the excitement of that night's conflict caused a relapse of a dangerous illness, which ultimately carried him to the grave. Of that more anon.

From that time the dissolute husband of Diomida gave himself up to the most licentious excesses; setting no bounds to his desires and outrages: his days were consumed in ennui and gloom, the nights were spent in carousal and riot. When he promenaded the streets, or his swift gondola shot through the canals, all women of modesty shrunk from his gaze, and drew down their veils; while noble cavaliers pitied the wild young profligate who was rushing headlong to ruin, dissipating a princely patrimony and blighting the ancestral honours of a noble name.

Giulio now shunned entirely the presence of the heart-broken Diomida, though often his palace resounded with the noise and tumult of reckless companions, the principal of whom was his evil genius Count Strazoldi.

It was rumoured in Venice that the beautiful but vicious Lucretia had too readily favoured the addresses of Count Giulio, and that her brother had been rendered both blind and dumb by a present of many thousand sequins. Their amours were the common topic of the day, and ribald improvisitori of the lowest class sang of their intrigues to the rabble on the Bialto, the Piazza of St. Mark, and all the public places of the city. Poor Diomida clasped her hands, and prayed

to Heaven for succour when she heard of these things: she was sinking fast, yet still fondly hoped that Giulio might see the error of his ways, and learn to love her as of old.

Could the wretched count have beheld his pale and suffering wife during one of her many dreary hours of silent and lonely anguish, his heart, unless lost to every sense of honour, must have been wrung within him: he would have been struck with remorse to behold the misery he had wrought for one so young and so beautiful—so loving and so patient; an angel of heaven, compared with the demon of wickedness to which he had transformed himself.

But the count never saw her now. With his cousin the abandoned Lucretia and her equally abandoned brother, or with Elmina la Mandona the most beautiful courtezan in Venice, he lived a life of debauchery and extravagance, till his coffers were drained, his retinue dismissed, his horses sold, and his estates, pictures, libraries, jewels, and plate had all melted away like snow in the sunshine. The grass grew in the stable court, where the stall collars of sixty steeds had rattled in his father's days; weeds and flowers flourished on the palace-walls without, and spiders spun their webs undisturbed on the gilded columns and gorgeous frescoes within: even the once gay gondola, that bore the crest of his house on its prow, lay unused and rotting in the grand canal. His exhausted finances would not now admit of his giving splendid entertainments to gay beauties at their own houses, or musical fêtes on the moonlit water: he no longer reclined in glittering gondolas, gorgeous with rich hangings, redolent with the perfume of flowers, and ringing with laughter the music of lutes and the voices of Elmina and her companions, as they glided along the winding canals of Venice after every other sound in the city was hushed.

After an absence of some months from his home, the count one night returned: but how accompanied? He brought with him Elmina and a troop of her companions, who again filled the once desolate palace with riot and disorder, and penetrating even to the private apartments of the unhappy countess, insulted her so grossly that she rushed out in sorrow and terror into the streets.

"O Girolamo, my brother, hadst thou been here, instead of sleeping on the field of Francavilla, thy unfortunate sister had not been brought to this!" was the exclamation of the poor wanderer, as she abandoned her once happy home at midnight, and, accompanied only by one aged domestic, set out for Nuovale, the last of their country villas which the spendthrift had left unsold.

She might have complained of her wrongs to the good Doge her uncle; but he was bowed down with sickness, age, and infirmities, brought on by his wounds received in the wars of the Republic, and increased by troubles arising from the intrigues of proud and plotting Venetian nobles. She wished not to add to his distress by a recapitulation of her own; but hoped that, by suffering in

silence, time would bring about a change: for she yet cherished the idea that her still-loved Giulio might again return her affection. But, alas for Diomida! time brought no change to happiness for her.

Forgotten and forsaken, she lived in the utmost seclusion and retirement; while her husband continued his career of riot, gaiety, and dissipation at Venice, with his cousin Lucretia. That most beautiful but abandoned woman, seemed to rejoice in thus openly triumphing over her married and virtuous rival: but her wicked ends were not yet accomplished. She had long resolved that Diomida should be destroyed and that the count should become her own: a terrible climax was fast approaching.

It was soon whispered abroad by the scandalous tale-bearers of the city, that for most imperative reasons, the Signora Strazoldi had retired to a solitary villa on the Brenta, accompanied by her mother the old countess; who in her younger days had been equally infamous for her intrigues and dissipated life. Meanwhile Count Stefano, to preserve appearances, challenged Della Torre to a duel in the Piazza of St. Mark at noon. But other means were to be taken, and the cavaliers never came to the encounter.

Bewitched by the beauty of the artful Lucretia, tormented by her tears and reproaches, and stung by the taunts of her mother and the threats of the boisterous and fierce Stefano, Count Giulio thirsted with all the avarice of a miser to replenish his exhausted exchequer with the yet unimpaired fortune of his cousin. Yielding to all these baneful impulses, he concerted the destruction of the unhappy Diomida; sinking his soul yet deeper in misery and crime. The honour of the Signora Lucretia was to be fully restored on her public espousal by the Count Della Torre. Descended from one of the most ancient of the twelve electoral families, he now found himself obliged to wed a daughter of his uncle by marriage; who ranked only in the third class of the Venetian nobility, and whose name had been enrolled in the "Golden Book" for a few thousand sequins required in some of the pressing emergencies of the Republic.

It was arranged that the young countess should be murdered while her uncle John Cornaro, laid on a couch of pain and sickness, was unable to avert or avenge her fate. Elmina la Mondana was employed by Count Giulio to be the assassin, and she departed from Venice with ample bribes and instructions from Lucretia and her mother. Accompanied by Count Stefano, she reached Nuovale in disguise, and was introduced alone into the sleeping apartment of Diomida, when the latter was preparing to retire to bed. The aspect of this fair, young girl—perishing under the lingering agony of a breaking heart and a wounded spirit tortured by the reflection of a life lost and a love misplaced—raised no pity in the bosom of the cruel Mondana; who marked with heartless exultation, that the roundness of the stately form of the wronged wife was gone, her cheek pallid

as death, and her eyes glassy and colourless.

"Pity me, gracious countess!" whined the treacherous Mondana grasping a concealed pistol, while she bowed humbly before her victim; "I am a poor woman whose husband was a trooper and served under the brave Girolamo Cornaro, in the wars of the Count di Merci, and was slain in battle by his side on that unhappy day in the Val di demona.

"Poor woman!" said the Countess, touched by her tears; "and what would you with me?"

"Charity, if it please you, gracious lady. I have heard that none sue a boon in vain of the beautiful Diomida, whose heart is so compassionate."

"I have had more than my own share of woe in this bad and bitter world, even though I have barely seen my eighteenth year," replied the poor girl, sighing deeply, with an air of pity and dejection that would have touched the heart of any one not wholly depraved. "All who have served with my beloved Girolamo, on that fatal field, are welcome to me. And so you say your husband was a trooper, poor woman?"

"A soldier who did good service against the enemy, as this letter from the Colonello Cornaro to the Count di Merci can sufficiently prove."

"For my brother's sake, I will cherish the memory of this poor Italian soldier, and befriend thee as his widow. Rest this night at the villa Nuovale, and to-morrow you shall be properly provided for. Meanwhile, I would fain look on the letter of my brother Girolamo." Throwing on her laced night robe, and confining within a gauze caul the luxuriant tresses of her golden hair, the unsuspecting girl drew near a lamp to peruse the pretended letter; when Elmina, taking advantage of the moment, levelled a pistol at the gentle head of Diomida, and fired. But the muzzle dropped, and the ball passed through the body of the Countess, who sank at the feet of her murderess with a shriek, while her life blood flowed in a crimson current, deluging the beautiful bosom, whiter than marble of Paros.

Struck with horror the moment she committed this frightful act, Elmina fled to her guilty paramour, Count Stefano, who had been watching impatiently beneath the window of the apartment. On learning that Diomida was only wounded, he rushed up stairs to complete her destruction; and, in a transport of infuriated malignity, stabbed her with his poniard, until her bosom became a shapeless mass, so horribly was it mangled.

Masked like a bravo, with his broad hat flapping over his eyes, Stefano cut his way through those whom the uproar had assembled, and who, though disposed to bar his passage, shrank from his bloody hand and formidable figure. He rejoined Elmina, whom he also destroyed by a blow of his poniard, to prevent her betrayal of him; and after flinging her body into the Brenta, which flowed past the walls of Nuovale, he was conveyed back to Venice in a gondola. To Giulio

and his accomplices at the palace of Strazoldi, he displayed his bloody poniard, and the marriage ring of Diomida, as tokens that she was now no more. Then, for the first time, was the conscience of Count Giulio touched with compunction at the sight of that little golden symbol: his mind reverted in agony to the hour of his espousals before the altar of Santa Maria, when he had placed this ring on the finger of Diomida, his loving and beloved bride. How had he fulfilled the solemn vow of those nuptials?

But the deed was done, and the wedding ring of Diomida glittered in the hand of her relentless rival; who regarded it with eyes which, bright and beautiful though they were, sparkled with triumphant malice and revengeful joy.

"The ring is here, and we want but the priest to mumble Latin and so finish the night with a proper bridal," said the ruffian Stefano, in tones husky with fatigue, as he quaffed a sparkling draught of wine. Giulio felt a stifling sensation in his throat, and his heart beat wildly.

"Think you, I will be wed with the ring of Diomida Cornaro?" exclaimed Lucretia, scornfully. "Perish the bauble with the hand that wore it!" and thus saying, she cast the trinket into the canal that flowed dark and silently beneath the windows of the palace. The fair image of his gentle wife arose vividly before Count Giulio at this moment, and he shrank with loathing from the side of Lucretia; regarding her brother with a horror which he could scarcely repress as his hand involuntarily sought the hilt of his poniard.

Strazoldi noted his agitation, but knowing that taunts or threats would only be fuel to the fire that was smouldering in his heart, he called for wine; and Giulio drank deeply to drown remembrance. The juice of the grape, and the caresses of the fascinating Lucretia, soon made him forget for a time; and the night was given to revelry, and the formation of plans to cast the guilt of Diomida's murder on the banditti of the hills or the bravoes of Venice. But they were miserably deceived.

Morning came, and with it horror, dread, and doubt—to the unhappy Giulio at least: his cousin and adviser, Count Stephano, was a villain too hardened to feel compunction at having murdered a woman whose life was an obstacle to the accomplishment of any purpose of his. Morning came, and rumour with her thousand venomed tongues had poisoned the ears of all Venice with the hideous tidings. The church Della Salute was hung with black, the bells of San Marco tolled a knell, and the banner bearing the winged lion of the Republic hung half hoisted on the ramparts of the ducal palace.

That night a gondola cleft the bright waters of the Canal di Giudeca, conveying the terrified and guilty fugitives from Venice: gold strengthened anew the arms of the sturdy gondolieri, as they tore on through the foaming sea. Meanwhile, an enraged mob had given the palaces of Counts Della Torre and Strazoldi

to the flames; a lurid light from these blazing piles shone on the domes and spires of Venice, on the long lines of magnificent edifices, and the canals that wind between them. As the hum of the multitude died away on the night wind and the fugitives saw the city grow dim and vanish behind the northern islets of the Lagune, their guilty hearts beat less fearfully. Liomazar received them, and the heads of their fleet Barbary horses were turned towards the Austrian frontier: that day they rode sixty miles without drawing bridle. They forced their horses to swim the Piove and Livenza, even though the deep broad currents of these rivers were unusually swollen by floods rushing down from the mountains of the Tyrol, laden with shattered pines and terrible with rolling stones and falling rocks. But on—on! was the cry; for fierce pursuers were behind. Fifty cavaliers, the flower of the young nobles, with a squadron of the Dalmatian guard, followed them with headlong speed.

Belgrade and Latisana opened their gates to these guilty ones; but they were still forced to fly, goading on their sinking steeds with spur and poniard. Lucretia and the countess her mother were faint with fatigue; the horses were failing fast, and the mountains of Carinthia were yet far distant; while the passing breeze brought to their ears the blast of a trumpet: its sound was their knell, for their pursuers kept on their track like Calabrian bloodhounds.
[Transcriber's note: this page (186) is referenced in Volume 3.]

Finding it impossible to cross the frontier, they threw themselves into the tower of Fana, a baronial hold of Count Giulio, near Gradiska, one of the strongest garrison towns in Austrian Friuli. On this impregnable castle, perched on a rock overhanging the fertile valley watered by the Isonza, Giulio hoisted his standard; but his half Sclavonian, half German vassals mustered unwillingly beneath it, when they found a siege was to be endured: the cavaliers from Venice, having invested it on every side, resolved to exterminate this infamous family.

Empowered by letters from the Doge, the Venetians obtained the assistance of the Count di Lanthiri, grand bailiff of Friuli, who raised all his military followers in arms, together with the vassals of the duchy. In addition to these, a regiment of Austrian infantry was brought from Gradiska by its deputy-governor, the brave Baron di Fina, knight of Carinthia and the Golden Stole—an order which none but the noblest Venetians wear.

The castle was encircled and a trench thrown up to cut off all communication with the surrounding country, while a strong force of Austrians guarded the opposite bank of the Isonza, to prevent escape: a needless precaution, as the rock on which the fortress stood descended sheer down to the river many hundred feet below, where, foaming over in a white cascade, the stream rushed in boiling eddies round crags and promontories, as it hurried on to hide its waters in the Gulf of Trieste.

Stefano di Strazoldi was roused to the utmost pitch of ferocity of which the peculiarly excitable temperament of an Italian is susceptible, when he beheld the fortress environed: he resolved on a vigorous defence, and resorted to all those military tactics which he had acquired when serving under the grand-master Zondodari. The unhappy Giulio, finding that no alternative was left but to die bravely sword in hand, or perish ignominiously on the scaffold, gathered a fierce courage from despair, and assisted in the defence of the walls with an energy which drew forth many a boisterous encomium from Stefano, who seemed quite in his element when the castle rocked to its base with the discharge and recoil of its artillery: he swaggered from place to place, blustering and swearing, dividing the time between draining deep flagons in the hall and urging the defence of the garrison. The sturdy Sclavonian vassals of Fana, though terrified at beholding the displayed standard of the grand bailiff, and seeing that the assailants wore his livery and the Austrian uniform, fought, nevertheless, with the most resolute valour: as their lord and feudal superior, they deemed the count a greater man than Lanthiri, and with unflinching spirit toiled at the castle guns for four-and-twenty hours. The vassals of the duchy, repulsed and disheartened, were about to abandon their trenches and retreat; but just then the Baron di Fina brought an Italian brigade of artillery against them, and the flagging conflict was renewed with redoubled vigour.

From its rocky base to its frowning battlements, the whole castle was involved in fire and rolling smoke, and the inhabitants of Friuli and Gradiska crowded to the adjacent hills to behold the unusual scene. Clad in his rich state uniform, a white feather in his hat and the star of St. George of Carinthia sparkling on his breast, Count Lanthiri led the assailants, and directed their operations. He was mounted on a spotless black horse, and formed a perpetual mark for the cannon and musketry of the besieged. For twelve hours, de Fina's cannon poured their iron hail against the outer wall till it was breached, and an enormous mass fell with a thundering crash into the Isonza. The Sclavonians then retired with precipitation to the keep; where they fired from loophole, bartizan, and barricade, with unyielding resolution. The breach being effected, Lanthiri sent forward a trumpeter, who summoned the garrison to surrender; but, contrary to the usage of war, and regardless of the banner of the duchy which was displayed from the trumpet, Count Strazoldi shot the bearer dead. A tumultuous shout of rage burst from the assailants on beholding the cruel deed.

"Forward the grenadiers of Gradiska!—Revenge!" exclaimed the grand bailiff, spurring his black horse up the outer breach. "On! on!—Close up, and fall on! No quarter! Follow me with bayonet and sabre!"

Regardless of the fire to which they were exposed, and which was strewing the outer court with ghastly piles of killed and wounded, the vassals of the duchy

pressed on. The brave old Baron de Fina blew open the gate of the keep with a petard, which he hooked to it and fired with his own hand. With a triumphant "viva!" the soldiers rushed through the opening, where Lanthiri was encountered hand to hand by Count Giulio; who, forgetting his crimes, gave way to that inborn thirst for blood and conflict which for ages had distinguished his family. The combat was brief. He was borne backwards before the charged bayonets of the Austrians; while his guilty companion, Stefano, was beaten to the earth, and lost his right hand by a stroke from the Baron de Fina's long Italian sword, which was wielded with both hands, and did terrible execution among the Sclavonian vassals of Fana. These infatuated men were appalled by the fall of Strazoldi; whose activity and presence of mind had conspired, more perhaps than the Count's authority, to animate them during their desperate and rebellious resistance. They were compelled to yield before the headlong rush of their infuriated assailants; and in ten minutes the banner of Count Giulio was pulled down, torn to shreds, and given to the winds: he himself was heavily ironed, and despatched, with his mutilated associate in crime, under an Austrian escort, to the strong citadel of Gradiska; while his castle, lands, and followers, were given up to pillage and devastation by Lanthiri.

During the fury of the siege, the miserable Lucretia, overcome with terror and remorse, and the fatigue of her rapid flight, was prematurely delivered of a son. The fierce Lanthiri, regardless of the tears, sighs, and agony of the desolate mother, ordered the child to be cast into the Isonza; but the more humane de Fina, a veteran of the Count di Merci's wars, directed that the infant should be placed in the monastery of San Baldassare in Friuli, where there was a lantern for the reception of foundlings.

On finding himself a fettered captive in the gloomy dungeons of Gradiska, Strazoldi became furious with rage and almost insane, through the conflicting emotions of love for his sister, sorrow for her dishonour, and shame for the dark blot which crime had cast for ever on their family name. Cursing Lucretia and her amours, his mother and himself, he tore the bandages from his wounds, and bled to death. Count Giulio, who was confined in the same vault, beheld with stern composure the life-blood of his companion ebbing away, without offering aid. Thus, in a fearful paroxysm of mental and bodily agony, the soul of the fierce Stefano passed into eternity.

Lucretia and her equally wicked mother were placed in a Calabrian convent. Della Torre was ordered by the senate to be brought to Venice, where his name was erased from the pages of the "Golden Book," which contains the arms and names of all the nobles of the state. His participation in the assassination of John Cornaro's niece, and his rebellion against the bailiff of Frinli were the climax to all his other excesses; which his enemies now exaggerated until they were re-

garded as of tenfold enormity. The people once more rising in a mob, demolished such ruins of his palace as the fire had left; and tearing the very foundations from the earth, set up instead a column of infamy, to mark the spot to all succeeding ages.

In custody of the common headsman—a black-browed ruffian, with naked arms, blood-red garb, and glittering axe—Della Torre entered Venice; only three days after the venerable Cornaro, weighed down with the cares of state, with age, infirmity, and sorrow, departed in peace at the palace of Saint Mark. His body was embalmed, and laid for the allotted time on a bed of state covered with cloth of gold; his sword girt on the wrong side, and his spurs having the rowels pointed towards the toes: such being the usual manner of arraying the Doges, when after death their bodies are laid out to be viewed by the knights and nobles of the Republic.

Forgetful of the illustrious dead, all Venice rang with the shouts of

"Hail to the new Doge Alviso Mocenigo!" Proveditor General at sea, and commander in Dalmatia, whom the Great Chancellor was conveying to his coronation. The mass del Spirito Santo was sung in the cathedral of the patron saint, Marco. Its vast dome, upheld by nearly three hundred columns of marble and porphyry, towering like an eastern pagoda, and brilliant with alabaster and emeralds, the spoil of rifled Constantinople, reverberated to the holy anthem within, and the joyous bursts of loyalty without. Amidst the clangour of bells and the shouts of the people, the new Doge embarked in a magnificent gondola, covered with a canopy of velvet and gold and decorated with the banners of the knights of the Golden Stole and St. Mark the Glorious. Onward it moved, amid beating of drums, braying of trumpets, the booming of artillery and the acclamations of the people, towards the Palazzo di San Marco, followed by two hundred gondolas bearing the standards of noble families; and surrounded by the gleaming bayonets and halberds of the Dalmatians, the Sclavonians, and other battalions of the Venetian capelletti.

The two great pillars, surmounted by gigantic lions, which formerly stood on the Piræus of Athens, and now erected in the arsenal of Venice, were enveloped in garlands of flowers and floating streamers; two hundred cannon thundered forth a salute from the banks of the grand canal, while the ships and galleys replied by broadsides in honour of Alviso. The nobles were escorting the new Doge to that lordly dome from which but an hour before the superb catafalco bearing the remains of his aged predecessor had departed. Scattering gold among the people, the Doge Alviso ascended the Giant's Staircase; on the summit of which he was invested with the ducal robe and bonnet studded with precious stones. After which, the most noble Angelo Maria Malipierro, senior of the forty-one electors, made an oration to Alviso and his people.

Amid this scene of joy and splendour—to which the bright meridian sun of a glorious summer day lent additional charms, spire and tower gleaming in its golden light, and the long vistas of the sinuous canals (where not shadowed by the gigantic palaces) shining like mirrors of polished gold—Giulio della Torre, who never again could partake of these festivities, stood an outcast felon, fettered and in rags, by the column of infamy that marked the site of his detested palace. Never did he feel the bitter agony of merited humiliation so much as at that moment, when the Doge's splendid train, glittering with all the pomp of wealth and nobility, swept through the marble arch of the Rialto.

There is no crime, however foul, for which gold will not procure a pardon, both from church and state, in Italy; but Count Giulio was a beggar, without even one quattrino. Those who now possessed his villas and castles—having either purchased them in the days of his mad extravagance, or holding them from Mocenigo on his forfeiture—were loudest in his condemnation; although his hands were yet unstained by blood, and he had been the dupe of a beautiful but vicious woman and the unwitting tool of a desperate debauchee. In the solitude of the horrible piombi, he had ample time to reflect on the insanity of his career, and to repent: he wept for Diomida, and beat his head against his dungeon walls in the extremity of his agony. He endured all the pangs of remorse and self-reproach; and looking back to that proud eminence on which he had so lately stood, admired, honoured and beloved,—a position to which the talents of his high-born ancestors had raised him, and his then virtues entitled him,—Diomida, the gentle, the suffering, and beautiful, arose vividly before him, gashed by the dagger of Strazoldi. Then his reason tottered, and he longed for death to relieve him of his misery.

The new Doge Alviso Mocenigo, remembering an old grudge he bore Count Giulio, shewed now, in the plenitude of his power, the true Venetian spirit of revenge: he cast him into one of those dreadful cells under the roof of the palace of St. Mark—the worst of the piombi or leaden dungeons—where the wretched prisoners, stripped to the skin, are chained to the pavement, and exposed to the burning rays of a hot Italian sun concentrated in a focus, until their brains boil and they become raving maniacs.

During the heat of a scorching summer, the unhappy della Torre experienced these frightful torments in their utmost extreme, till he found relief in furious madness. The stern Doge Alviso, insatiate in his thirst for revenge, consigned his fallen foe to the galleys of the Maltese knights, where the flaying rod of the task-master restored him to his senses and the pangs of reflection and remorse.

Recollection slowly returned, and the once noble Giulio della Torre, who had been chained to the oar a crazed maniac, became in time a hardened villain,

lost to everything but a craving for vengeance on Mocenigo; which, happily, was never gratified. The bandits, bravoes, and other murderous villains, with whom he was compelled to associate, applauded, pitied, and encouraged him by turns: or affected to do so; but the meanest citizen of Venice would not have glanced at him on the highway. Mocenigo died; and for ten long years Giulio tugged at the oar: but the thirst for revenge never passed away. The galley was wrecked on the rocks of Alfieri on the Calabrian coast; he escaped, and turned robber. From a robber he became a hermit, secluded in the wild woods, and dwelt in the habitation which you now behold.

Know that *I am he* of whom I have spoken: once Giulio Count della Torre di Fana; but prouder of the humble title of Il Padre Eremito of the Tomb! Here have I dwelt for sixty long, weary, and monotonous, though peaceful years. Time seemed to stand still, and death appeared to have forgotten me. Until three days ago, when first I felt his cold hand upon my heart, I feared that, like the wandering Apostle of the Scripture, I was to live on undying, until that last dreadful day when the heavens and the earth, the dead and the living, shall come together.

* * * * *

Such was the story related to me by this singular being, omitting the frequent outbursts and exclamations of horror, grief, remorse, and exhaustion with which its course was often interrupted. The dying man now finally paused, overcome with exertion and the intensity of his emotions.

After many pious ejaculations and muttered prayers, his strength gradually became weaker, his voice more faint, and utterly exhausted by his long confession, he sank into that dull lethargy so often the forerunner of death. Rolled up in my cloak I sat beside him, watching the ebb of decaying nature, and pondering on the peculiarity of my situation and this strange tale of other days. I seemed still to hear the querulous tones of his feeble voice long after his lips had ceased to move; but at last, overcome with the toil of the previous day and night, I could no longer resist the weariness that oppressed me, and sank into a deep sleep.

When I awoke, the morning sun streamed brightly through the ruined window of the tomb, and its yellow light, piercing through the gloom, fell with celestial radiance on the bushy beard, attenuated form, and rigid features of the old recluse. The clasped hands, the fixed eyes, and relaxed jaw informed me that his spirit had fled, and I reproached myself bitterly fur having been so forgetful as to sleep and permit the poor old man to die unwatched. I stirred him, but he felt no more: I laid my hand on his heart, but its pulses were still. How many millions of his contemporaries had been consigned to the tomb, where perchance even their bones could not now be found, while he had lingered on—an animated mummy

withered in heart and crushed in spirit!

I now departed, obliged to leave to fate the chance of the hermit's remains obtaining the rites of sepulture. The idea troubled me but little at that time: when campaigning, unburied bodies are no more thought of than dead leaves by the way-side. But I learned afterwards that, by order of Petronio, Bishop of Cosenza, the old hermit was interred with great ceremony in the ancient tomb; which was converted into an oratory, where the prayers of the passers-by might be offered up for the repose of his soul. The gown and rosary of the hermit may yet be seen there by any one who is curious in these matters.

Upon leaving the tomb, I thought more, perhaps, of my horse than of the hermit: poor Cartouche had been exposed to all the fury of the last night's storm. I hastened to the place where I had picqueted him; he was gone, and there still lay many miles of wild and rugged country between me and Crotona! First securing the door of the tomb, to keep wolves, lynxes, or polecats from the remains of the recluse, and muttering a hearty malison on my predicament and the loss of my valuable horse, I set out in the direction of the rising sun, which was my surest guide to Crotona.

After breakfasting on the wild apples, plums and peaches, that flourished by the road-side, and taking a hearty pull at my friendly flask to correct their crudeness, I pushed forward on my solitary march with all speed. On reaching a place where the road dipped down between two steep impending banks, from the summits of which the shady oaks formed by their entwined branches a thick impervious arch of the richest foliage, what was my delight on beholding my gallant grey quietly cropping the green herbage under the dewy shade! His reins trailed on the ground, his coat was rough, and the saddle and housings were awry; but on hearing my joyous halloo and whistle, the noble charger pricked up his ears, neighed in recognition, and, trotting up, rubbed his head upon my shoulder. In a minute more I was upon his back, and passing hill and hollow at a speed which not even the swiftest horse of the boasted Calabrian blood could have equalled.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SIEGE OF CROTONA.

Descending the chain of mountains terminating in the Capo della Nuova, I beheld

before me the wide expanse of the Adriatic Sea stretching away into the Gulf of Tarento, now beautifully illumined by the light of the setting sun. As the fiery orb sank behind the hills I had left, it beamed a bright adieu on the towers of the Achæan city; tinging with saffron and gold the waves that broke upon the Capo della Colonna—the ancient promontory of Lacinium, once celebrated for the magnificent temple of Juno, destroyed by the soldiers of Hannibal.

The school of Pythagoras—the glory of Græcia Major—had disappeared with the power of Crotona; and of the majestic fane of Juno Lacinia but one solitary column—rearing its massive shaft above the prostrate ruins of the rest, and half submerged in the waves of the encroaching sea—remained to attest the grandeur of the edifice in its glory; when Greek, Ausonian, and Sicilian, bowed their heads before its pagan altar. The temple is now nothing but a heap of stones, mantled with green slime and sea-weed; and the desolation is heightened by the discordant screams of flocks of sea birds.

The banks of the classic Neathus have lost all their boasted beauty and verdure, and are now covered with sedgy marshes and stunted trees and shrubs; very different from that umbrageous foliage which clothed them in the days of Theocritus.

Having ridden for the greater part of the day under a burning sun, during the sultry hours of afternoon—a time which the voluptuous Italian passes in the slumbers of the siesta—I was half choked by thirst and the oppressive heat of the atmosphere, and Cartouche was beginning to falter with fatigue. As I slowly followed the tortuous windings of the road to Crotona, the approaching dusk of evening gradually invested in its sombre veil the brilliant scenery: the Adriatic turned from gold to crimson and the distant hills from emerald green to misty purple, until their bright summits faded away into the dim horizon, and the blue vault of heaven assumed the aspect of a spangled dome, spanning land and sea; while the moon ascended slowly to her place, like a mighty globe of liquid silver rising from the dark heaving waters of the ocean.

Evening had given place to night: but such a night! It seemed more beautiful than day! The balsamic odours of orange, olive and lemon groves, were wafted on the soft, refreshing breeze, till the whole air seemed to thicken with delicious fragrance. The sweet strains of the "Ave Maria" stole up the valley from the lighted chapel of a solitary convent, and the deep-toned chimes from a distant steeple were borne on the cool air, mingled with the tinklings from the lowing herds, and the evening hymn chanted by the shaggy-coated herdsman as he drove his cattle towards the basin of a gushing fountain. Myriads of insects buzzed around us, and Cartouche kept switching his long tail like a whip and shaking his ears with irritation, as they floated in a black cloud around him.

I found the modern Crotona to be little better than a village, dominated

by the citadel or castle. Every vestige or memorial of its ancient grandeur had passed away, save the moss-grown column on the cape; and nothing survived of the once-magnificent city, from the gate of which the gigantic Milo led forth a hundred thousand men to battle. The superb temples over which waved the banner of Justinian, the massive walls and brazen gates which the cohorts of Totila the Goth assailed in vain, had long since crumbled into dust, and a wretched hamlet marked the site of the ancient Crotona of Mysellus.

The half-ruined citadel, built by Charles V., was occupied by a French garrison. It was blockaded by a brigade of British commanded by Colonel Macleod, and the Free Corps of Santugo, on the land side; while the *Amphion* frigate, with a squadron of Sicilian gun-boats, cut off all supplies, succour, and communication from seaward. The French were reduced to great straits at the time of my arrival, and were daily expected to capitulate. General Regnier—who, since the battle of Maida, had endeavoured to maintain his ground between the citadel and Catanzaro (one of the finest towns in the province)—made suddenly a precipitate retreat towards Tarento; abandoning his soldiers in Crotona to their fate.

At Tarento, he was attacked by the chiefs of the Masse and the brigands, who compelled him to retire after losing seven hundred men. The Marchese di Monteleone narrowly escaped being taken prisoner while leading on a desperate charge at the head of a "handful" of cavalry. To his bravery and exertions when commanding the rear-guard, Buonaparte attributed solely the effective retreat of his shattered forces through these wild and savage provinces. The discomfited general retreated along the shore of the Adriatic with the utmost rapidity; passing through Melissa, Gariati Nuova, and Rossana, until he reached the northern frontier of Calabria Citra: then, turning like a hunted stag on his pursuers, he stood once more at bay; and, with the remnant of his force, took up a position at Cassano. There he entrenched himself, and awaited the formation of a junction with Massena, the Prince of Rivoli,—"the child of victory," and of devastation,—who was advancing at the head of an army flushed with success. Gaeta, after a brave defence for three months, had been surrendered to Massena's division by Prince William of Hesse Philipstadt.

On my approaching Crotona, the red gleams that flashed across the darkened sky, and the deep booming sounds that broke with sullen reverberations the silence of a calm evening, announced that an interchange of heavy shot was taking place between the besiegers and the citadel. The loud report of the frigate's 42-pounders could easily be distinguished from the lighter artillery of the gun-boats and the curricle guns, which formed the only battering train Macleod had with him. From an eminence, I had a perfect view of the whole plan of operations. The noble frigate—whose lofty masts, well squared yards, sparkling top-light, and swelling sides, were reflected in the dark blue water—had been hauled close in

shore, for the purpose of battering the citadel; but now, as the darkness was fast descending, her boats were towing her beyond range, and she came to anchor out of gun-shot in the Gulf of Tarento.

From the moment the first parallel was laid down, the siege had been pushed strenuously. On the land side, a line of circumvallation, consisting of a good breastwork and ditch, had been drawn around the fortress, to defend its besiegers from the incessant fire of the citadel. The daring and determination of this gallant little garrison drew forth the admiration of all; save the revengeful Calabrians, who panted for its surrender with a blood-thirstiness increased by resistance. The garrison was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel de Bourmont: it had numbered only a thousand at the time of Regnier's retreat, and was now greatly reduced by the casualties of war. One night, sallying forth at the head of two hundred grenadiers, and passing through a line of counter-approach, De Bourmont completely scoured that part of the trenches occupied by the Calabrians, under Visconte Santugo. The exasperation of these Calabrians, and their thirst for deadly retribution, are inconceivable. On their crucifixes, on their daggers, and on the bodies of the slain, they solemnly vowed vengeance on the garrison when it capitulated; and only our bayonets restrained their cruelty.

The streets of Crotona appeared empty, and the town almost deserted; the spent cannon-shot and shell splinters, against which my horse continually struck his hoofs, sufficiently informed me of the reason. Many houses had been unroofed by the bomb batteries, or reduced to ruins by the cannonade; very few remained inhabited, and those only which were at a distance from the fire of the batteries. The French works were mounted with forty pieces of the heaviest ordnance.

I found Macleod among the parallels, where he was on the alert day and night, superintending the relief and defence of the trenches. His uniform was completely concealed by a rough great-coat, above which he wore a tartan plaid to protect him from the dew; that falls heavily by night in this warm climate, and always in proportion to the intensity of the heat of noon-day. An undress bonnet, a dirk, and basket-hilted sword completed his equipment. He read by torch-light the laconic letter of his friend the general; who, however, had enclosed documents of a more official nature for Captain Hoste, R.N., commanding the *Amphion*. The note ran thus:—

"DEAR PETER,

"If Crotona does not surrender in twenty-four hours after Dundas arrives, take the d—ned place by storm. Yours ever,

"J.S."

"Extinguish the torch, or there will be a vacancy in the Buffs to-morrow!" said Macleod to the soldier who held the hissing and flaring link. At that moment a thirty-two pound shot came whizzing along and buried itself in the breastwork, covering us with dust and clay. "A narrow escape!" continued the colonel; "these favours are exchanged liberally here. The podesta will order you a billet somewhere for the night; but come to me in the morning: my quarters are in the Strada Larga. I must send you to De Bourmont, as none of my fellows know any language save that spoken north of the Brig of Perth. By dawn, we will have the citadel summoned in due form by sound of trumpet. Meantime, adieu!"

After considerable trouble I discovered the residence of the podesta in the miserable marketplace. I procured a billet on a house which proved to be a place of entertainment, though a very desolate one. There I hastened to take up my quarters, wearied with fatigue and the heat of the past day, and having an appetite like that of a hawk. Resigning Cartouche to the care of the colonel's groom, I forthwith ordered a meal which was to pass for dinner and supper. Brisket à la royale, garnished with pickles, maccaroni with Parmesan cheese, &c., were the best the house afforded; these, with fruit of all kinds, and a decanter or two of Gioja wine, furnished a good repast enough for a hungry soldier, who had just escaped an iron pill that no mortal stomach could digest. The waiter had just removed the cloth, and I was stretching myself on the sofa to enjoy my first cigar, when Santugo entered, cloaked, booted and belted as if for some important expedition.

"How, my lord, for the trenches to-night?" said I, springing up.

"No, faith! the Free Corps have had enough of the trench duty. But, per Baccho! my friend, how rejoiced I am to see you," he exclaimed, flinging his plumed hat one way and his mantle another. "Cazzica, I am going to a place to-night where few men dare show their noses; and yet there are some of the prettiest faces in the kingdom of Naples within its walls: faces which, monsignore, the sun (as being of the impure masculine gender) dares not even to kiss with his rays. What say you, signor?"

"That I shall be most happy to accompany you, my lord: but let us finish this decanter first."

"Of the most inveterate soakers are you redcoats! Signor Claude, of all men in Italy, I would prefer you to stand by my side to-night."

"There is danger, then?'

"You readily appreciate the compliment. It may so happen that there will be a scuffle," said he gaily, as stretching out his legs and lounging back on his chair

he half closed one eye, and with the other scrutinized the colour of his wine with a critical air.

"Good Gioja that; what vintage, think you?"

"The last earthquake, perhaps."

"I'll trouble you for the caraffa. In short, signor," said the Visconte, becoming suddenly grave, "I am obliged to throw myself entirely upon you, and rely on obtaining your assistance and advice. Being a Maltese religioso, Castelermo declines to accompany me; though I know that he loves convents no better than I do. He was once jilted by a nun, and plundered of his patrimony by an abbess, as he may yet relate to you; for poor Marco is a most inveterate proser, and sure to tell his love-story when not absorbed with his other theme, the glories of Malta the knight Valetta and old Villiers de l'Isle Adam. My relation Benedetto mounts guard in the trenches to-night, and their greatnesses of St. Agatha and Bagnara are doubtless immersed in the intricacies of chess, or the nonsense of faro: thus I have no friend but you; and as we were good friends of old in Sicily, and comrades at Maida, I am encouraged to make you the depository of my secret."

This serio-comic preamble led me to expect some wondrous disclosure. He paused for a moment, and heaved a long preliminary sigh: when, as I filled up our glasses, his glance fell upon Bianca's ring which glittered on my finger. He changed countenance visibly, and for an instant his dark eyes kindled with fire, while his brows knitted and became as one.

I was beginning to erect my bristles in turn; when, assuming a grave but not unpleasant tone, he thus addressed me:—

"Signor Claude, I perceive you have already won far on the good graces of my cousin Bianca. From what passed at Palermo, I might have expected this; and yet, considering the shortness of the time, and the pride of the girl, I am somewhat surprised. But I have no wish to interfere: nor shall I have cause; if, in loving her, you bear always in mind that she is the daughter of a soldier, and the cousin of one of the first Neapolitan nobles."

Not altogether pleased at his tone, I was about to reply—perhaps with an air of pique—when he continued, with a laugh—

"Stay, caro Claude! I know what you would say: that you value not a rush the wrath of any man; and that you love Bianca as never man loved woman. I can imagine all that: but beware how you display the jewel before some eyes! Many a poniard that now rests quietly in its sheath might be edged and pointed anew. Eh—hah! excuse my brevity, and want of ceremony just now; but having a love affair in hand, time presses. One at a time is quite enough to be concerned in."

"Believe me, Luigi, if I can be of any assistance, it will afford me inexpressible pleasure."

"Good! I knew you would be my friend."

"But whom mean you to parade?" said I, stretching my hand over a table where my pistols lay.

"Per Baccho!" said he, with an air of displeasure; "a duel is the first thing you Britons think of when one is in a scrape. There are none fought in Italy. A bravo's poniard at a ducat the inch—you understand?"

"Then, Santugo, the lady——"

"Is a nun of the convent of Santa Caterina da Siena here, at Crotona."

"A nun?"

"In that little word lies all the danger, the difficulty, and the devilry!"

"To poach on the preserves of his Holiness is ticklish work in this part of the world!"

"I know it," he replied, gloomily; "and am acquainted with three gentlemen of Naples who, for meddling with ecclesiastics, have borne all the terrors of the law—imprisonment, ignominy, the weight of the public scurlada, and confiscation of everything: they are now compelled to serve under Frà Diavolo, Francatripa, and others, as common brigands. Per Baccho! I have not forgotten the unhappy Cavaliere di Castelluccio, who was lately spirited away by the Bishop of Cosenza, and has never been heard of since. However, these are but slight dangers for us, over whom the holy office once stretched its iron arm. In these days, what priest would dare to put forth his hand against me, the Visconte di Santugo, and Grand Bailiff of Calabria-Ultra? Well, Claude, the lady is a nun; and I must have her to-night, even should we be compelled to fire the convent, and carry her off in the confusion. Ah! Del Castagno tried that with a girl at Nicastro—a dashing attempt; but he was caught by the sbirri of the Bishop Petronio and consigned for six months to a dungeon at Canne, where black bread and stale water so completely cured him of the tender passion, that he regarded the poor damsel with the most pious horror, and has now become the sober-minded husband of cousin Ortensia. But I jest with a heavy heart! Dundas, I believe you to be honourable as I have found you brave; and in the affair of to-night, would rather have you as my comrade than any of the volatile Neapolitans of my acquaintance—fellows whose friendship will perhaps only last while the flask contains a drop of wine and the purse a ducat."

"The lady?" I observed, impatiently.

"Is Bianca's sister."

"How! the Signora Francesca?"

"Even so: the second daughter of old Annibale di Santugo, who fell while fighting under the Cardinal Ruffo in Apulia. Though poor in ducats, he was rich in blood and name—being my father's younger brother. With his last breath, he bequeathed to my care his three motherless girls—Ortensia, Bianca, and

Francesca. Francesca was esteemed the greatest beauty in Italy; yet in an excess of folly—or rather, let me call it, generosity—she immured herself in a convent. To remove the only obstacle to her sister's marriage with my friend Benedict, did this dear girl (of all the loves I have had, my only true one!) give up her slender patrimony, and take the veil in this convent at Crotona. But the bright tresses shred from her brow were scarcely consumed on the altar, ere bitter repentance and heart-consuming grief seized her. I was serving with the Neapolitan army in the Roman territories, and had not then seen her—at least, since her childhood. Would to God that I never had! How much agony might have been spared both of us! I met her at the baths of Nicastro; where, in strict charge of my mother, she had gone, by special permission, for the recovery of her health, which the close confinement of the cloister, unavailing regrets, and a lingering love for the world she had left, were destroying. I was fiery, ardent, and only three-and-twenty; she, a drooping but beautiful girl, devoted to Heaven—a veiled and vowed nun. Oh! what madness could have prompted me to love her? But Cupid and the devil are always at one's elbow. We were cousins—a dangerous relationship—and our intimacy, open and unconstrained, plunged us at once into this delicious passion, the impulses of which I found it impossible to resist. I evaded the watchful eyes of my mother, and gained, beyond redemption, the affections of poor Francesca. She returned to her convent wretched and heart-broken. Infamy and death are, perhaps, before her. Oh! Madonna mia! She must be rescued, and at all risks!" he exclaimed, leaping up, and wrapping his cloak around him. "You will accompany me, of course? Remember 'tis the sister of Bianca!"

"And if she consents to elope?"

"We must carry her off to a little villa I have somewhere in the Val di Demona. There she can be quietly domiciled until the uproar is over, and I can obtain a dispensation from Rome; after which she may resume her old place in society, and laugh at the authority of the Signora Abbadessa—who, I learn from her friend, Benedetto, is a regular Tartar. Now, Claude, let us march."

I buckled on my sabre, drained the decanter, and, forgetting the fatigues of the day, set forth with Santugo. We were both muffled up in our cloaks, and had our forage caps pulled over our faces to elude observation.

At the corner of the Strada Larga, I lit a cigar at the consecrated lamp before a Madonna, and we pushed on at a brisk pace, regardless of the maledictions and cries of "Eretico!" which my heedless act called forth from some Crotonians who

observed it.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ABDUCTION.—A SCRAPE.

We left Crotona by an ancient archway, massive, dark, and covered with lichens; and almost hidden beneath a mass of vines and ivy. Through this gate, perhaps, had rolled the "tide of war" that swept away the host of the luxurious Sybarites. Taking the road to the old promontory of Lacinium, a quarter of an hour's walk brought us beneath the high walls of the convent, which, from the summit of a wave-beaten rock, threw a long dark shadow across the moonlit Adriatic. The wild roses and orange trees grew in luxuriance on three sides of it, and filled the air with a fragrant perfume.

"How brilliant the moonlight is!" said I, by way of saying something, for my lively friend had become unusually silent and thoughtful.

"Hush! Signor Claude; speak softly, and keep well in the shadow. As for the moon, I would that the angel of darkness stretched his wings between us. I could well spare her lustre just now. If we are observed, our walk will have been to little purpose."

"Ghieu! I believe you; ho! ho!" laughed a strange voice near us.

"Did you speak?" asked Santugo, in a fierce whisper.

"Not I," was my somewhat curt reply.

"Corpo di Baccho! then we are watched!" he exclaimed, drawing his sword, and searching about him with kindling eyes.

"Imagination, Santugo."

"Ghieu! ho! ho!" laughed the voice again, close behind me. I turned suddenly round, but saw nothing, save the massively-jointed wall. I was startled and annoyed, and instantly loosened my sabre in its sheath, keeping my sword arm free from the folds of my cloak.

Santugo's irritation was excessive; he ran his sword into every bush, searched every nook and corner, and scanned the whole walls, even at the imminent risk of being discovered, but to no purpose: whether the voice was real or imaginary was yet a mystery. We listened intently; all was still, save the soft rustle of the orange trees, and the dash of the surf, as the Adriatic rolled its waves on the basaltic cliffs beneath the convent walls. A bell, swung from a beam in the

square, open-arched campanile, or steeple, tolled midnight; and a faint, flickering light was immediately seen transiently lighting the tall windows of the chapel, illuminating the bright hues of the stained glass, and burnishing the stone tracery of each in succession.

"'Tis Francesca d'Alfieri!" exclaimed the Visconte, with rapture. "She does penance alone in the chapel to-night; each sister does so in turn. I have enlisted the zitella of the convent in the service of love, and have no doubt of success." While speaking, he threw a handful of sand against a lattice, which opened, and a young female face appeared; a rose was thrown to him, and he clapped his hands twice: these were the private signals agreed upon. At that moment, I was certain I heard a growling chuckle close by us; but, without taking notice of it, I listened attentively for any sounds that might follow.

"Is all safe and quiet, Signora Pia?" asked Santugo.

"All, monsignore; but for sister Francesca's sake and our own, be cautious," replied the girl, with a trembling voice. She then unrolled a ladder of rope from the window, to the inside of which she assured us it was firmly fastened. In imitation of Santugo, I folded my cloak round the left arm, and mounting after him, scrambled to the summit of the wall, then leaping down we found ourselves standing in the garden, where our feet made terrible havoc among the abbess's flower-beds and glass-covered seeds.

"Che gioja!" said Santugo; "all is safe! a twenty-oared scampavia awaits us beneath the shadow of the convent wall: Giacomo has manned it with thirty of the most unscrupulous in the ranks of the Free Corps. But two grand points are yet to be gained; the postern must be unbarred, and the cord of the alarm bell cut; after which, we may proceed leisurely, and laugh at the rage of the Abbadessa." He walked quickly towards the chapel, and I followed, feeling somewhat piqued at the cautious manner in which he revealed to me his plans.

The zitella (or girl of the convent) led us into the chapel, every part of which was involved in deep gloom, except a little shrine, where, beneath a gothic canopy of white marble, stood a silver image of Saint Hugh. Two tapers glimmering before it served to reveal the figure of the fair devotee, as she knelt with clasped hands before the gilded rail which enclosed the object of her devotions—the shrine of the patron saint of her family. The beauty of the little edifice, and the richness of its shrines,—its columns with shafts of porphyry and capitals of marble,—its roof of gilded fresco, and floor of the most elaborate mosaic,—its alabaster tombs and gorgeous altar were all unheeded. We stole softly up a side aisle, and concealed ourselves behind the dark shadow of a monument, where I had leisure to observe Francesca and compliment Santugo on his admirable taste.

There was something in the gloomy and mysterious aspect of the place, the situation and sombre garb of the recluse, which fascinated me, not less than

the beauty of her person. It was long since I had seen her, and she now seemed more lovely and more interesting than ever: and more like Bianca. Her face was pale—too pallid perhaps—but of a beautiful oval form, and possessing a regularity of feature which would have been deemed insipid, but for the lustre of her dark Ausonian eyes, and the peculiarly aristocratic curl of her lip. Luigi spoke hurriedly:—

"Signor Claude—you remember her—and the night with the conciarotti. 'Tis Francesca—my matchless Francesca, as good as she is timid and beautiful! O, Anima mia—behold me—I am here!" he added, going softly towards her; "courage, sweet one! there is not a moment to be lost. I have possession of the postern towards the sea, where a barge of twenty oars awaits us. Do not shrink from me, Francesca! The hour of deliverance and of happiness is come."

"O, never for me—on earth at least! Madonna, guide me, look upon me in this moment of doubt and agony!' she exclaimed, in tones of despair. Sinking against the altar rail, she clung to it with one hand, and covered her face with the other, sobbing heavily. The Visconte knelt beside her. Her beauty, her distress, her resemblance and near relationship to Bianca, all operated powerfully upon me, and I felt for her deeply.

"O, misery!" she exclaimed, in a low but piercing voice; "Luigi of Santugo, to what are you about to tempt me? Reflect upon the deadly sin of this act!"

"Evoe! ho! ho!" laughed a shrill voice, which awakened the thousand echoes of the hollow chapel. Francesca clung to Luigi, overcome with shame and terror; and looking up, I beheld above my head the great visage of the hunchback, peering from beneath the shadow of a gothic canopy, under which he was squatted "like a pagod in a niche obscure." A terrible grin of malice and mischief distorted his hideous lineaments. I rushed upon him, but he slid down a pillar like a cat, and eluded me. The startled Visconte silenced at once all the scruples of his cousin, by snatching her up in his arms, and bearing her into the garden; a task which evidently required considerable exertion, notwithstanding the seeming lightness of her figure. But a plump girl of twenty or so is not so easily run away with as romancers would have us to suppose. At that moment the alarm bell was rung furiously, and through the open arches of the campanile, we saw the figure of the hideous imp, Gaspare Truffi, swinging at the end of the rope, and grinning like a demon, while he danced and yelled at the top of his voice, "Evoe! ho—ho! Ghieu! Sacrilege and rescue! Ajuto! help!"

"Would to Heaven I had pistols to silence the clamours of that apostate wretch!" exclaimed Santugo, as the noise of approaching feet and the hallooing of men were heard in the distance. "The bell is arousing the paesani!" he added, drawing his sword. "Quick, signor! As my friend and brother officer, good service must you do me this night, or, by the crown of the Sicilies! you must think no

more of Bianca d'Alfieri." I liked neither the words nor the tone; but pardoned them out of consideration for the anxiety of my excitable companion.

"The zitella keeps the postern beside the fountain, sparkling in the moonlight yonder, and through that door we must pass to the sea!" The poor zitella lay senseless beside the gate, weltering in her blood, which flowed copiously from a severe wound in her temple, and the key having been broken in the lock by Gaspare, our retreat was utterly cut off! The alarm and exasperation of Santugo were indescribable. The devil! what a moment it was, a forlorn hope was nothing to it!

The bell continued tolling; the whole convent was alarmed, and a mob was heard clamorously demanding admittance at the porch. The visconte's followers were as noisily enforcing ingress at the seaward gate; on which they thundered with their oars and musket butts, vowing dire vengeance if their lord was in the least maltreated. Long ere this, the Signora Francesca had fainted.

"Aprite la porta—open the gate! Beat it down! Plague of San Carlo upon it! Bravo Giacomo!" cried Luigi. "Via! it yields: strike well and together! A hundred ducats to the hand that beats down the door! Heaven be thanked, a cloud is obscuring the moon, and it will not be known which way we steer!"

"Viva la Signora d'Alfieri! Viva Monsignore Santugo! Corraggio, colonello mio!" cried the Calabresi, as they redoubled their attacks on the strong oaken postern.

"Sacrilege!" cried the shrill voice of the Abbess from a window; whence she implored the people to rescue a daughter of the church whom brigands were carrying off perforce.

At this critical moment the great gate was opened, and a mob of peasantry, mule-drivers, and fishermen, armed with clubs, rifles, ox-spears, and poniards, almost filling the garden, rushed with a yell upon us. Giacomo's boatmen at the same time had beaten the postern-door to fragments, and the light of the waning moon poured through upon the glancing bayonets and white uniforms of the Calabrian Free Corps.

"Save the zitella!" cried Santugo. Giacomo bore her on board the scampavia, in the stern sheets of which Santugo deposited his cousin, and brandishing his sword aloft, gave a reckless shout of triumph. It was the last I saw of them. Enveloped in murky clouds, the moon sank behind the mountains of Isola, and the scene became suddenly involved in gloom. The assailants were too close upon me, to permit my following the Visconte's example, by springing on board; and I was compelled to stand on the defensive, slashed one across the face with my sabre, he fell shrieking into the water, where the relentless Giacomo despatched him with the boat hook. I was soon hemmed in on every side; and sinking beneath a shower of blows, was beaten to the ground. The last sound I heard was

a yell of defiance and rage, as the broad oars dipped into the water, and the swift scampavia shot away like an arrow from the shore.

Supposing me slain, Luigi thought only of saving Francesca; and while his twenty rowers pulled bravely, the soldiers gave the baffled pursuers a volley from their firelocks. The Calabrian peasants never went abroad without their cartridge boxes, poniards, and rifles. The latter were in instant requisition; and a skirmish ensued, in which several were wounded on both sides before the fugitives were beyond range of musket shot.

Reckless and bold as he was by nature, perhaps Santugo would not have dared to commit such an outrage against his religion, and the prejudices of the Italian people, at any other time. But the power of the Church, shaken by the recent destruction of the (misnamed) holy office, was feeble; and such was the disorderly state of the country, then filled with armed banditti who made it the scene of perpetual rapine and warfare, that the authority of the law, at all times weak, was completely neutralized. The rank, power and wealth of Santugo's family, and his interest with Carolina and the court of Palermo, emboldened this wild young noble to plunge into what was esteemed by the superstitious and bigoted Calabrians as a deed replete with sacrilege and horror, and which could not fail to draw down the utmost vengeance of the Church and Heaven itself upon the unhappy perpetrator and his impious followers. Indeed, a short time afterwards the Papal malison was duly thundered forth against Santugo and myself, and published in the columns of the Diario di Roma; consigning us to the warm protection of his most satanic majesty.

For that I cared less than for the broken head and sore bones which were my share of this adventure. I had also the pleasant prospect of my name becoming a standing quiz at every mess in the Mediterranean when the story appeared in the *Gazzetta Britannica*—a gossiping, military, patriotic paper published during our occupation of Sicily, and the only public journal in the island: where the press is (or was) under the severest restrictions.

The clamours of the people at this act of sacrilege led me to expect the worst treatment at their hands. Stunned by the blow of a club, I was severely beaten while lying on the beach, and narrowly escaped being poniarded by the hunchback; from whose vindictive malice I was saved only by the intervention of a priest. Elevated on the shoulders of some herdsmen, Truffi now harangued the rabble—proposing, first, that they should tie a stone to my neck and cast me into the sea, or bind me to a tree and make me a target for their rifles at eighty paces. Resistance was vain, as they had securely bound me with my sash. But I demanded instant liberation, and that my sabre should be restored to me; and I threatened severe retribution from our general and the chiefs of the Masse should they dare to maltreat me.

Though they laughed at my threats, their effect was not altogether lost; and I was not subjected to further violence. Placed upon a sorry ass, and accompanied by a throng of shouting peasantry, I was conducted back to Crotona in ridiculous triumph, and then thrust into an iron cage at the end of the Casamatta, or ancient prison of the town, where I was left to my own reflections for the remainder of the night, or rather morning—for it was then past three o'clock. I was burning with indignation against these base ragamuffins, whose pomelling made every joint of my body ache; but nevertheless soon fell into a sound sleep on the stone floor of the cage; nor did I awake until the morning sun shone down the picturesque vista of the dilapidated Strada Larga. I arose with stiffened limbs; and at first was unable to comprehend where on earth I was. But the cries of "eretico!" "assassino!" "ribaldone!" &c., and a thousand other injurious epithets with which I had been greeted by the rabble, were yet ringing in my ears, and, together with the disordered state of my dress, brought the whole affair to my recollection. With revengeful bitterness, I remembered the many indignities I had received from Gaspare Truffi: once he had snapped a pistol in my face; twice he attempted to poniard me; and he would probably have had me despatched, but for the firm intervention of an old Basilian father. A dim recollection floated before me of having seen his gnome-like visage peering between the iron bars of the cage long after the crowd had departed—his eyes glaring with hatred and malice that made them glisten like a snake's beneath the dark shadow of his heavy brows—while he informed me, in the guttural Italian of Naples, that I would "yet feel his knife between my ribs, as he was sworn to revenge his gambling defeat at Nicastro," and the sabre-cut bestowed on his hump at the Villa of Alfieri.

"'Sdeath!" thought I, while starting up from my hard couch, "I must have this creature flogged or hung! It is too ridiculous to be persecuted by a contemptible hunchback, who follows me like an evil genius everywhere. Olà, Signor Benedetto, Cavaliere del Castagno!" I cried aloud, as that redoubtable gentleman swung himself over a window of the podesta's house and alighted in the street about a hundred yards from me. But without looking to where the voice came from—as he had evidently no wish to be recognised—he drew his hat over his eyes, threw his ample cloak over his disordered attire, and hurried down the Strada Larga. I remembered the podesta's daughter—a pretty girl, from whom I had received my billet last evening.

"Poor Ortensia!" thought I; "and thus your loving Benedict spends his tour of duty in the trenches!"

Save himself, no one seemed yet stirring in Crotona; its ruined streets were completely deserted. At times a casual patrol of our troops passed; but these were far beyond hail: and, in truth, I looked forward with dread to being discovered in the cage—knowing too well it would furnish a subject for laughter to every

corps in Sicily. The idea of the general's aide-de-camp being barred up in an iron cage, like a common rogue, or a rat in a trap, was too replete with ridicule to be patiently endured: but, after a few attempts to break prison and escape, I was obliged to abandon the attempt and await my deliverance patiently.

To increase my annoyance, a few withered and sun-burned gossips gathered round the parapet of a circular well (a fountain, by-the-bye, is ever the grand rendezvous of Italian gossips), and after filling their classic-shaped jars with water, they rested them on the margin of the spring, and stared at me to their full contentment; relating to the passers-by their own version of the story, with such additions and variations as the exuberance of their fancy or hatred of a heretic suggested. To the peasant come to market in his wolf-skin jacket and leather gaiters; the hind driving his team of oxen to the field; the shepherd on his way to the mountains; to the water-carrier; the impudent, rosy-faced itinerant improvisatore with his lute; and the white-bearded Franciscan, with his greasy angular hat, snuff-begrimed cassock, and begging-box;—to each and to all who stopped at the well, did these shrivelled crones relate, with great emphasis and gesticulation, the story of the sacrilege committed at the convent of St. Catherine by the English heretic.

Vehement and ugly, as all old women in southern Italy are (the lower classes at least), they soon collected a dense crowd round the cage, and I was stared upon by a circle of hostile eyes in a manner very unpleasant to endure. I might have laughed at a predicament so ridiculous, but the petulance of the Crotonian rabble soon became annoying; their religious scruples were aroused by the malicious observations of these old gossips, and I began to expect a martyrdom like that of St. Stephen.

But relief was at hand. Cavaliere Benedetto, though he hurried off so abruptly, had recognised me, and despatched a party from the trenches to my rescue. I hailed with joy their glittering bayonets, which I soon saw flashing above the head of the mob. Bitter was the wrath of the Italian soldiers when they beheld me so unworthily treated; their musket butts were in immediate requisition, and in three minutes one side of the cage was dashed to pieces, and I was free.

Under their escort I gladly hurried to my billet, where I put my disordered uniform in proper trim for appearing before Macleod after breakfast.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SUMMONS OF SURRENDER.

Meanwhile, Santugo and his fair companion were ploughing the waters of the Adriatic, and scudding along the coast of Calabria as fast as twenty oars and an ample lateen sail, filled by a strong Borea or breeze from the north, could carry them. With the Visconte, and still more with his cousin, the affair was not yet ended; innumerable griefs and troubles were in store for them. But I heard no more of the abduction for a time, save in the jokes of my comrades; and once in a friendly note from the general, warning me to avoid all such affairs in future, as they were calculated to prejudice the Calabrians against us, and injure the cause of Ferdinand, for whom we were fighting.

I had just completed my brief toilette, and was hastily paying my respects to hot chocolate, devilled fowl, cream cheese, marmalade, and maccaroons, when Santugo's grave friend, the Maltese knight, Il Cavaliere Marco di Castelermo, entered.

"Basta!" he exclaimed, casting aside his sword and sable cloak; "what have you and the Visconte been about last night? Broken into a convent of consecrated nuns, as if it had been a mere bordello of Naples, and carried off, by force of arms, the queen of that sainted community! It is a sad affair, signor."

"Sad, indeed, as my ribs find, to their cost, this morning: moreover, I have lost in the scuffle a splendid sabre of Damascus—the last gift of a friend who fell beneath the guns of Valetta."

"Ah! you served there? So did I. So Santugo has robbed the convent of its brightest jewel—Francesca d'Alfieri, who shone among the beauties of Palermo like a comet among the lesser stars."

"The young lady has attractions which——"

"Attractions!" exclaimed the enthusiastic Italian; "I tell you, signor, she is magnificent! Ah! had you seen her last year, when she appeared as Madonna, on the festival of the blessed Virgin! The whole country did homage to her wondrous beauty. Francesca seemed a vision of something more than mortal, as she sailed along on the lofty gilded car among clouds of gauze and silver, with a crown of diamonds blazing on her ebon tresses, wings on her shining shoulders, and incense, divine music, light and glory, floating round her. Basta! she was an angel of love! The people, as they knelt, forgot their prayers to Madonna, and offered up only praises of her beauty. I honour the Visconte for carrying her boldly off. The girl would have been destroyed in an Italian convent; where (I blush to say it) purity of heart is a wonder, and innocence a crime. But I tremble to think of the retribution which the Bishop of Cosenza may deem due for the abduction: he is a stern, relentless fellow."

"But what will the lieutenant-colonel commanding think of Santugo abandoning his battalion—deserting in fact, with thirty rank and file of the Free Corps, with their arms and accoutrements?"

"His youth, rank, and the ideas of our country must plead for him."

"And then the sacrilege, signor: what will the people say of it?"

"Just what they please, Santugo is too spirited a cavalier to value a rush the silly scruples of a bigoted peasantry, or the idle thunders of a knavish priesthood. He will only remember, that in abducting his cousin—replete with danger though the act may be—he has done a good deed in the cause of love and humanity. Corpo di Baccho! read "The Prosecution of the Dominican Nuns of Pistoia in 1781, by the Canon Baldi," and you will see there disclosed a mass of the most corrupt female profligacy: a revelation amusing as it is horrible. Signor, you would shrink with dismay if made acquainted with one-half of what passes within the walls of our southern convents, where belladonna, the dungeon, and the poniard are too often at work. In the indictment of the Canon Baldi there is displayed a regular system of depravity, into which the young nuns are slowly initiated (after the first year of their novitiate is passed), as into a lodge of freemasonry—craving pardon of the gentle craft for a comparison so vile. Basta! manfully as I have fought for Italy and her ancient liberties, I would yet more willingly lend a hand toward the utter demolition of every convent within the land. Still, thanks to Madonna! I am a true Catholic, and commander of the Maltese cross; and as such I swear to you, signor, on the blessed badge of the isle, that no man has a better reason for being at feud with the female order of ecclesiastics than I have. I was ruined in my prospects, seared in heart, and robbed of my patrimony by the knavery of an abbess and the art of a deceitful nun. But enough of this." He paused, with a kindling eye, and his cheek coloured as if he remembered that more had been said than was quite necessary; but mastering some old recollection or inward emotion, by a strong effort, he continued, in a tone of affected carelessness, "Signor Claude, there is a relief in telling one's sorrow; and some night, when the Gioja or Lipari loosens my tongue, you may learn how it first came to pass that I shaped the Maltese cross on my shoulder. But just now we must hurry to the trenches, upon which De Bourmont has commenced his morning salute of round shot and grape."

We found the whole citadel of Crotona, and the outwork possessed by the French between it and the sea, enveloped in white smoke; amid which the dark corbelled battlements, the flames that flashed through, and the bayonets that glittered over them, were seen for a moment, and then obscured as the smoke wreaths rolled on the morning wind. The French worked at their batteries manfully, pouring showers of cannon-shot, bombs, and bombelles, on our troops; who were pretty secure behind their breastworks, and repaid them with consid-

erable interest from an eminence on which a fascine battery was erected.

Le Moine fired salvoes by sound of bugle, and the *Amphion* discharged her broadsides, and with such effect that a great part of the castle wall came away in a mass from the rocks, and the unfortunate who lined it were hurled into the ditches in an instant: the well-jointed masonry rolled down like a stony avalanche, and cannon with their carriages, fragments of bodies and weapons strewed the streets below. Three hearty cheers arose from our trenches, and were echoed by the tars of the *Amphion*; which was hauled yet closer in shore, and poured her shot in rapid succession on the lower works of the citadel. The Sicilian gun-boats, with their thirty-two pounders and howitzers, dealt death and destruction among the sand-bag batteries and stockades: these the French soon abandoned, retiring with precipitation into the castle of Carlo V. After maintaining a brisk cannonade for nearly two hours, the fire of the enemy began to slacken; and by the material with which their guns were served—such as pieces of metal, crowbars, broken bottles, stones, bolts, and bags of nails—we perceived with satisfaction that their ammunition was fast failing. Yet they manned the breach as if expecting an assault immediately; and, even while exposed to a galling fire, worked bravely, repairing the damaged wall with fascines, bags of sand and wool, stakes and "chandeliers." They were doubtless resolved to meet any escalade with the courage of Frenchmen, and with the indomitable valour that distinguished all soldiers of the empire.

At last the fire on both sides ceased, the clouds of smoke curled away from the old towers of Charles V., the bright sun shone joyously on bastion and curtain, and we plainly beheld the sad havoc made by the salvoes of our batteries, and the broadsides of the frigate.

"Now, Dundas!" cried Macleod, scrambling out of the trenches, "as the gallant Monsieur de Bourmont has given over his morning's shooting, and as you know something of his lingo, just tie a handkerchief to the point of your sword, and go up and inquire whether or not he means to surrender the place without any more bother? If not, let him expect broken heads to be plenty before tattoo to-night. By Heaven! the Ross-shire Buffs will dye their tartans red in the best blood of his garrison, brave fellows though they be!"

"And the terms, colonel?"

"Such as Frenchmen—such as brave soldiers may accept without dishonour; but nothing more. Give this my summons of unconditional surrender; and, as they know not of the fall of Gaeta and Massena's advance, they will no doubt yield at discretion."

With a white handkerchief fluttering from the point of my sabre, and having a Corsican bugler in attendance, I departed on my mission from the trenches; where more than two hundred of our soldiers lay weltering in their blood. Most

of their wounds being inflicted by cannon shot, or the explosion of bombs, were ghastly beyond description. The earthen trenches in some places were literally flooded with gore. None but those who have seen a man bleed to death from his wounds being left undressed, can imagine how much blood the human frame contains. The ensanguined mud, where corpses, wounded men, fascines, shot and shell, lay all mingled together, made our approaches frightful; and I gladly sprang out and left them behind me.

As usual, the morning was beautiful: earth and sky were bright with summer splendour. The sea of Adria shone in a blaze of yellow light, and the chain of mountains stretching away to Isola, the little white village dotting the sandy beach, and the solitary column of Juno Lacina, afar off, made up a charming landscape; the beauties of which, my mind was then too much occupied to appreciate. To bear a flag of truce is an exciting duty; and I felt my pulses quicken, on finding myself close under the enemy's cannon, yet warm with the heat of their last discharge. As I approached the old fortress, its walls shone gaily in the bright sunlight; but the blood oozing from the carved stone gargoyles, or spouts, of the battlements, told a terrible tale of the havoc made by our shot and shell.

An ample tricolour waved lazily in the warm breeze, and serried lines of bright bayonets glittered over the ramparts, while grim faces peered at me through the dark embrasures and narrow loopholes of the time-worn walls. The troops were formed in rank-entire, with arms shouldered. Poor old Bourmont was evidently making the greatest possible display of his force.

When within twenty yards of the gate, the Corsican sounded "a parley;" which was answered by beat of drum within the fortress. The rattling drawbridge descended, and a wicket opened in the gate, which was composed of enormous palisades, cramped and bolted together. (I observed everything narrowly, while they allowed me the use of my eyes.) Immediately on stepping through the wicket, we were encircled by twelve Voltigeurs, with fixed bayonets; and a young French officer, saluting me with his sabre, informed me that my eyes must be immediately blindfolded, and my orderly committed to close ward in the guard-house.

"Monsieur," I said, indignantly, "I am, as you see, a staff officer in the service of his Britannic Majesty, the bearer of a despatch to Lieutenant-Colonel de Bourmont, and not a spy!"

"My orders are strict," he replied, with equal hauteur; "since you have entered the gates, your eyes must be blindfolded, or you and the bugler will be made prisoners forthwith! I pledge you my word as a gentleman and soldier that no dishonour will be offered." We shook hands; the Corsican boy was consigned to the care of the barrier guard, while my eyes were blindfolded, and giving me his arm, the officer led me away in this ludicrous manner, I knew not whither.

On the bandage being removed, I found myself in a large vaulted room of the old castle. It was roofed with stone, and I heard the tramp of feet and rumble of gun-slides on the bartizan above. The groined arches sprang from twelve dilapidated corbels, representing the apostles. A bare wooden table, a few chairs and trunks, cloaks and sabres hanging on the wall, spurred boots, empty bottles, and cigar boxes lying in a corner, constituted the furniture of the room. The light streamed into it between the stone mullions and corroded iron bars of three deeply embayed windows; through which a view was obtained of the Gulf of Tarento stretching away to the north, and the dark wooded ridges of La Syla to the westward, rising five thousand feet above the sea's level.

Coffee, wine, cigars, French army lists, Parisian Moniteurs, and the last grand bulletin, lay on the table; at which De Bourmont, a fat but pleasant-looking old man, dressed in a blue frogged surtout and scarlet trousers, with a crimson forage cap, was seated with another officer, at breakfast.

"Monsieur le Commandant," said the officer who introduced me, "a flag of truce from the trenches—an officer of the enemy."

"Ah! they have come to terms at last!" said the little commandant, nodding with a very satisfied air to the officer who sat opposite him; and then rising, he handed me a chair. "Proud to see you, monsieur," he added, uncovering his bald head; "be seated—the wine is close to you. There is Muscatelle, or, if you like it better, far-famed Lachryma Christi and Greco, from grapes raised on the slopes of Vesuvius. We can get these things, you see, notwithstanding that the Scots colonel does push the trenches so vigorously. Mille bombes! ah, what a man he is! Yes, and we can get that which warms our hearts better than even Falernian wine or Greco—eh, Pepe?" he added, rubbing his nose, and giving a sly glance at his morose companion, who intently broke the shell of his third egg, without deigning to notice me.

"Would you prefer chocolate to wine, monsieur?" continued the colonel. "We will talk over matters during breakfast. I am glad you have come to terms—very!"

I accepted his invitation; but could not resist smiling at the complacent manner in which the Frenchman spoke of besiegers coming to terms with the garrison of a place which their cannon had almost reduced to ruins.

"How did your free Calabrians like the way we scoured the trenches the other night?" asked Captain Pepe, while handing me coffee.

"You taught them a good lesson. The marmalade? Thank you. An hour in the trenches has given me quite an appetite."

"And how did your old tub of a frigate, and her fry of gun-boats, like the chain-shot, the cross-bars, and stang-balls we favoured them with this morning?"

"Monsieur, I did not come here to answer insolent questions, but to de-

liver this despatch to Colonel Bourmont; who I have the pleasure to perceive is a French officer of the old school—a gentleman, and not a Parisian bully."

A quiet smile spread over Bourmont's face, as he bowed and took Macleod's letter; while Pepe, like a cowed bravo, bit his white lips and glared at me with ill-concealed malice and animosity: but I continued to help myself with perfect composure.

Exasperated by this cutting contempt—"By heaven and hell!" he exclaimed, "were it not that I must hold sacred the white flag you carry—mille baionettes!—I would cut you in two!" and starting from the table, Pepe retired into a recess of the window; where he affected to observe the saucy *Amphion*, which was riding with her broadside to the shore, the union-jack waving from her mizen peak—a striking feature in the view, but ill-calculated to soothe the wrath of the irritated Gaul. I could read the history of this repulsive man in the coarse features and strong lines of his sunburnt visage.

The French army at that time possessed many such spirits. Raised from the dregs of the people during the anarchy which followed the Revolution, many of the actors in those frightful tragedies and massacres that disgrace the nation became—rather by the force of circumstances than their own deserts—commanders in the armies of Buonaparte. Savage and black-hearted, furious and sour republicans, thus found themselves marching beneath the banners of an emperor; and some of them obtaining honours in that profession which numbers all the kings and princes of Europe among its members. But the true Parisian rabble, without one spark of the generous spirit of the soldier, were destitute of that chivalry which distinguished the old French armies in the time of the Bourbons. A knowledge of the men they fought against, caused our troops to regard the soldiers of the Revolution with equal detestation and contempt: this latter feeling, however, soon became changed when they encountered them as the army of Napoleon; who restored France to that honourable place among the kingdoms of Europe, from which she fell in 1792. The sanguinary rabble who hailed with yells of triumph the axe as it descended on the neck of the queenly Marie Antoinette—who clove in two the head of the beautiful Princess Lamballe, and dragged her naked body for days about the kennels of Paris, were forgotten when contemplating the glories of Napoleon, the long succession of his victories, the devotion of his soldiers, and the chivalric enthusiasm of the old guard. But to proceed.

De Bourmont looked over Macleod's letter in various ways, but could make nothing of it; upon which he asked me to translate it. So far as I can remember, it ran thus:—

"*Trenches before Crotona, July* 1806.

”SIR,—Further resistance on your part being now in vain, I give you until sunset to send away all the women and children; after which, if the citadel be not surrendered, your garrison shall be buried in its ruins.

”**I have the honour to be, &c. &c,** ”**PETER MACLEOD, Lieut.-Col.**
”Commanding Ross-shire Buffs.

”**Lieut.-Col. DE BOURMONT,** ”**Knt. Grand Cross of the Iron Crown,** ”and Commandant of Crotona.”

”Sur ma vie!” said the little colonel, reddening with indignation, and turning up his eyes on hearing this blunt message. ”Poof! what say you to this, Pepe, my boy?”

”Guerre à mort!” growled the polite Captain Pepe. ”Bedieu! I would slit the bearer’s nose, and send him back to the writer, as a fitting answer. Or what think you to summon a file of the guard and cry *à la lanterne*, as of old? Mille bombes! I have served many an English prisoner so in Holland: but that was in the days of Robespierre.”

”Halt! silence, monsieur!” said Bourmont, angrily; ”remember that you are among the soldiers of Napoleon the First, not the rabble of the Fauxbourgs of Paris.” The captain bit his nether lip and again retired to the window, while the colonel continued:—

”I shall not surrender; having good reasons for fighting to the last: and you, monsieur—monsieur—–”

”Dundas”—I suggested.

”Ah! Dundas; yes: pardon me. You are too much of a soldier not to be aware of them.”

”Colonel, I know not to what you refer. General Regnier has taken up a position at Cassano, from which he will inevitably be driven with immense slaughter by the chiefs of the Masse and the leaders of the brigands, who are all drawing to a head in that direction; so from him you can expect no succour. Monteleone by this time must have yielded to Colonel Oswald; and, Scylla excepted, every fortress has opened its gates to us. Of a force of 9,000 men who encountered us at Maida, 3,000 only march under the standard of Regnier. In the upper province, your troops have melted away before the Italians alone. Our shipping cut off all retreat by sea; our troops by land. You must capitulate: resistance will be madness, and a useless sacrifice of your brave soldiers; therefore permit me to entreat you to think well over the answer which I am to bear to an antagonist so fiery and determined as M’Leod.”

"Monsieur aide-de-camp, I thank you for the advice; but I hope French soldiers will not be cowed by Scot or Englishman," said the colonel. "Remember, that in the service of the Emperor, to be unfortunate *once* is to be for ever lost. Do you pretend ignorance of the fact that Gaeta was surrendered lately by the Prince of Hesse Philipstadt to Massena, who is now pushing on to our relief, and is by this time within a short day's march of Regnier's position at Cassano?"

"I know that the strong fortress of Gaeta has surrendered, after a gallant resistance," I replied, equally surprised and chagrined that *he too* was aware of the circumstance; "but who ever informed you that Marshal Massena was in the frontiers of Calabria Citra, told that which is false! His division is still at Gaeta, nearly two hundred miles from Cassano."

"Then I have been deceived!" exclaimed Bourmont, bitterly. This intelligence seemed to fall upon him like a thunderbolt. After a little reflection, he said, "Monsieur, if you pledge me your word of honour that the marshal is so far off, I will yield Crotona within an hour; reserving permission for the garrison to march out (through the breach, if we choose) with all the honours of war—with bag and baggage, colours flying and drums beating—the officers, of course, retaining their swords; and the whole force to be permitted to march to the camp of Cassano without farther hostility."

"Impossible, monsieur! who can answer for the barbarous banditti and lawless soldiery of the Masse? Remember the escape of Monteleone, and the massacre of his regiment at La Syla!"

"True, true!" he muttered, bitterly. "Mon Dieu! we are but a handful!"

"As a gentleman, as an officer, I pledge you my word, colonel, that Massena's division has not yet left even the Terra di Lavoura."

"Enough, monsieur: Crotona is lost; and with it the faithful services of many an arduous year! Arcole, Lodi, Marengo—O my God!" he covered his face with his hand.

"Ghieu! ho! ho!" croaked the voice of the everlasting hunchback, as he emerged from a recess in the thick wall, where he had been coiled up unseen by me. "I tell you, Signor Colonello, that the Prince of Rivoli's advanced guard was at Latronico in Basilicata, three days since!"

"Now, by heavens! crookback again: and here even!" I exclaimed, bestowing a black look on Truffi, whose false assertions were calculated to stagger De Bourmont. "This wretch, then, is the channel of your intelligence, monsieur? If my pride would permit me condescending so far as to defend myself against the idle contradictions of such a despicable opponent, I have in my sabretache a letter which proves where the marshal was three days ago. It was found among the papers of an officer, killed by a cannon-shot, when our fleet fired on Reamer's line of march by the Adriatic."

"A letter: bravissimo!" croaked Gaspare, while he snapped his fingers like castanets, and grinned so hideously that I burst into a fit of laughter. "Ghieu! Era scritto in tiempo del scirrocco!" (Fie! it was written in time of the sirocco.)

"No, Signor Canonico, you mistake," observed Captain Pepe, who could not resist giving us the vulgar Italian joke. "The letter, I have no doubt, was indicted at the trenches yonder, and may be right after all. You know that a pig and an Englishman are the only animals insensible to the effects of the scirrocco."

"Excellent," roared the hunchback, his hump heaving with laughter.

"Captain Pepe will oblige me by retiring to his quarters, and Frà Gaspare by quitting the room," said De Bourmont, indignantly. "In my presence, no British officer shall be wantonly insulted. Montaigne, send here the Captain de Viontessancourt; I will confer with him on this matter."

Pepe and Truffi disappeared together, and Montaigne, the officer who had introduced me, and who had hitherto remained silent, in a few minutes ushered in a tall, elderly man,—one of those kindly-looking old fellows that gain one's good will at first sight. He wore a light green uniform, and the medals on his breast, together with the keen, determined expression of his eye, announced him a thorough soldier; while his politeness and urbanity declared him to be every way the reverse of Mr. Pepe: in fact, he was one of those high-minded chevaliers of old France who had weathered the sanguinary storm of the Revolution. His hair was white as snow; and he seemed to be about sixty years of age. Bourmont introduced him to me, saying—

"Captain de Viontessancourt, 23rd Voltigeurs of the Emperor—Lieutenant Dundas, of the British service. My friend Viontessancourt has grown grey under his harness; and with him I will consult on this matter: it is useless to ask council of any of my other officers; whose continual cry is 'guerre à mort!'"

Giving me a file of Moniteurs to peruse, and pushing a brace of decanters towards me, he drew the tall chevalier into one of the deep recessed windows, where they remained in earnest confab for nearly half an hour. Bourmont then seated himself at the table at which I was sitting, and wrote to Macleod; offering to surrender the citadel, if the garrison were permitted to evacuate it with the honours of war and march without molestation to the French camp at Cassano.

CHAPTER XVII.

MARCHING *OUT* WITH THE HONOURS OF WAR.

To this proposal Macleod was half inclined to accede; but the captain of the frigate, a sturdy and impatient sailor, whom he consulted on the occasion, advised his accepting of nothing but an unconditional surrender. The colonel, who perfectly understood the punctilious ideas of military honour which animated De Bourmont, was inclined to spare that gallant Frenchman the disgrace of a complete capitulation; but yet, being resolved to get possession of Crotona, he had recourse to a curious military quibble, which has been resorted to on more than one occasion: particularly when General Ferrand, in 1793, surrendered the town of Valenciennes to our troops, under H.R.H. the Duke of York.

I returned to the citadel with Macleod's answer, and the high-spirited Bourmont, yielding to the pressure of circumstances, was obliged to consent to the dictated terms: these were—that his troops should march forth from the gates of Crotona, with all the insignia of military parade to the banks of the Esaro, where, at a given place, they were to halt, pile arms, yield themselves prisoners of war; surrendering arms, colours, drums, cannon, and everything except their baggage. After some troublesome diplomacy, and journeying to and fro between the trenches and the citadel, I got the whole affair arranged, and the articles of capitulation signed and sealed by both commanders, within an hour of sunset; by which time Bourmont's garrison was paraded, for the last time, in heavy marching order, and ready to evacuate the place.

The sun was setting behind the mountains when the frigate fired a gun; and before the white smoke had curled away through her lofty rigging, the tricolour had descended from the ramparts of Crotona. The gates were thrown open, and the drawbridge descended with a clatter across the ditch.

"It is the signal-gun: they come now!" cried Macleod, as he leaped on his horse. "Mr. Dundas, the brigade will come to 'attention' and 'shoulder.' Drumlugas," he added, addressing a strong, broad-chested, and red-whiskered captain of his regiment; "march your company to the gates, and the moment the last Frenchman has left them, hoist the standard. But, in the first place, march in and receive over the posts."

The tall captain touched his bonnet, and giving the order—"Grenadiers, threes right, quick march!" his company, with the band in front, marched up to the guard-house, where the French guard was under arms; and where, after all the usual formula, the whole of the sentries and posts were relieved by the Highlanders.

After delivering Macleod's order to the different battalions of his brigade, I selected from the ranks of the Calabrese corps, Luca Labbruta (or blubber-lipped Luke), a ferocious follower of Santugo, to watch for Gaspare Truffi (who, not being a French subject, was not included in the capitulation), and to seize the hunchback the moment the garrison marched out. He touched his knife with a

grim smile of intelligence, and left me.

The British forces, consisting of the 78th Highlanders, Les Chasseurs Britanniques, a small party of artillery, and the marines of the *Amphion*, formed two lines from the gate, facing inwards; and through this lane the garrison of Crotona were to march. In the rear were drawn up the ranks of the Free Corps, scowling darkly and handling their murderous poniards with a sternness of intent and ferocity of manner which declared how little they relished the modern laws of war, or understood that chivalric courtesy which brave men may yield to each other with honour, and which the soldiers of Britain and France can so well appreciate. Behind these dark-visaged battalions crowded the people of Crotona; while every window, nook, and corner, were filled with faces, eager to get a glimpse of their dreaded enemies, on whom they showered maledictions and abuse without cessation. The picturesque costumes of the crowd lent additional interest to the scene: the madonna-like profiles of the women, shaded by their linen head-dresses falling gracefully on the shoulders, or crowned by luxuriant dark hair secured by a gilt arrow, agreeably contrasted with the aspect of the well-mustachioed contadino, grim and swart, half bandit and half peasant, clad in his shaggy doublet and high hat flaunting with ribands and the red cockade of Ferdinand IV.; a dagger and horn in his belt, and the long rifle sloped on his shoulder, as we see him depicted in the spirited etchings of Pinelli. The buffalo herdsman with his long pole or glittering ox-goad, the bearded canon with dark robes and shaven scalp, and a thousand other striking figures made up a scene such as a painter or romancer would love. A battalion of the Chasseurs Britanniques—a corps composed of men of every nation—were drawn up opposite the Ross-shire Buffs; the garb of the latter nearly resembling that of the imperial legions whose swords had laid all Europe and part of Asia at the feet of Rome.

Filling up the background of this novel and picturesque scene, on one side rose the dark citadel, with its heavy ramparts and macciolated battlements, in the style of the middle ages; on the other, lay the little Italian town, with its balconies, verandahs, and terraces—its flat roofs of wood or tile, and its little square towers open on four sides, and covered with broad projecting roofs—one-half in light the other in deep shadow, as the setting sun poured its ruddy lustre from the summits of the distant hills. Beneath the castled rocks shone the glassy gulf, where cape and headland, breasting the rolling waves, stretched away to the horizon in dim perspective, till the soft blue of the ocean blended with that of the evening sky, and some white shadowy sail alone indicated the line where air and ocean met.

Immediately after the gun was fired from the *Amphion*, the French drums were heard beating, and the garrison came forth about six hundred strong; having two field pieces in front, with two tumbrils of ammunition, and two of baggage. They marched in subdivisions, with bayonets fixed, the right in front, the field of-

ficers mounted, with colours flying and brass drums beating; the gunners carried their linstocks lighted at both ends, and a ball was placed in the mouth of each piece of ordnance. Their *tout ensemble* was peculiarly service-like and soldierly; their dark greatcoats enlivened by red worsted epaulettes and scarlet trousers, and the bear-skin caps surmounting bronzed visages with rough wiry mustachios. Many of them were veterans of the empire, with hair grey as their goatskin knapsacks. The hoarse rattle of their brass drums, the sharply sonorous trumpets and clashing cymbals—a not unharmonious clangour of metallic music—loudly resounding as they marched through the archway of the citadel, lent additional spirit to the scene, as they advanced with all the order and steadiness of a review on the Champ de Mars. Their bayonets, brass-feruled musket-barrels, and the gilt eagles on their caps, gleamed in the rays of the setting sun, and the heavy silken tricolour flapped in the breeze, as it was up-borne above the marching column by Bourmont's only son, a mere boy, fitter for his mother's side than the harrowing scenes of war.

"Portez vos armes!" cried Bourmont, lowering his sabre on passing the first stand of colours.

"Brigade—present arms!" answered Macleod, with a voice loud and clear as a trumpet; and our double line 'presented,' the officers in front saluting with their swords, while our bands struck up the grand national air of the Bourbons, "Vive Henri Quatre." The French would perhaps have preferred the 'march' of Napoleon; but I perceived a flush cross the face of the old Chevalier de Viontessancourt, when the first burst of the air fell upon his ear. The animosity on both sides had evaporated; our hearts were full, and the generous "hurrah" so hard to be restrained, rose to every man's lips as the Frenchmen passed us.

The moment the last file had cleared our ranks, we "shouldered arms;" and, followed by a wing of the Buffs—to prevent the revengeful Calabrians from assaulting them—the French continued their march to the tomb of Croton (which, as old Ovid tells us, was the origin of the city), where, by the articles of capitulation, they were to be deprived of all their military insignia. Macleod, with the remainder of his brigade, took possession of the citadel—marching in with the *Amphion's* marines in front; the right being the post of honour generally assigned to that maritime corps. Drumlugas hoisted the British flag, which was saluted by the heavy ordnance of the frigate, thundering over the still waters of the gulf while the echoes of the Strada Larga were yet ringing to the music of the French band.

The Maltese knight, the Duca di Bagnara, and Cavaliere del Castagno, mounted on true Neapolitan steeds—small, strong, compact, large-headed, and bull-necked, perfect prototypes of the horses in ancient Roman bassi-relievi—brought up the rear with their battalions of the free corps; which immediately

broke ranks, and dispersed over the fortress in search of plunder: we had the utmost difficulty in rescuing from their bayonets and daggers the numerous wounded soldiers whom De Bourmont had left behind.

On reaching a pile of ruins called by tradition the Tomb of Croton, and situated near the banks of the Æsaris of the ancients, the French troops halted and piled arms; the officers dismounting, and the whole marching to a certain distance from the stands of muskets, they surrendered their cannon, colours, and drums, without scathe or damage, to the Ross-shire Buffs, commanded by Major Ferintosh. It was a humiliating act; but the honour of France was saved—the garrison having, in the fullest sense of the term, marched out with "the honours of war."

The swords of the officers were restored to them, and, with the soldiers, they were permitted to retain their baggage; but the whole were immediately embarked on board the *Amphion*, where they were in safe enough keeping within "the wooden walls of old England." They were sent to Messina; but were soon after exchanged, and transmitted by cartel to France.

Fra Gaspare—whom I was now more than ever eager to capture, having discovered that he acted the treble part of spy, assassin, and traitor—was not to be found within the fortress. All the efforts of Luca Labbruta, who, encouraged by my promised reward, searched every nook and corner of the fortress—the secret passages, stair-turrets, cells, and dungeons (the architect had provided enough of them all)—were in vain. I was provoked by his want of success. The hunchback certainly had not come forth when the garrison marched through the gates; and I could not feel quite at ease under the idea that this vindictive miscreant might still be lurking in one of the numerous holes or hidingplaces in the old citadel.

A writer on Italy remarks, that it is a national trait of the Calabrian provincials to be inflamed with the deadliest animosity against any person who discovers or reveals their secret villainy. I was well aware of this; and knew that Gaspare Truffi was to be dreaded rather than despised. But Cavaliere Benedetto soon discovered that De Bourmont, who found the little wretch useful as a spy, had connived at his escape in one of the covered waggons.

"I knew that he was not within the citadel," said Benedetto; "my fellows have searched every hole that would hide even a mouse: not a place between bartizan and dungeon-floor has escaped them; and I could have sworn by our Mother of Loretto—ay, and the miraculous grot of Capri to boot—that they would find him. But, per Baccho! we shall have the cursed gnome in our clutches some other time; and meanwhile, signor, consider yourself safe."

"I am surprised at being so fortunate in escaping his malice so long! He has had so many opportunities, when a shot——"

"No, no, signor," said Castagno, waving his hand disapprovingly; "I may

say with something akin to national vanity, that a Calabrian—though monks and scholars will tell you that he is but a mongrel of Greek, Latin, Lombard, and Saracen blood—can strike with his poniard surely and deeply at close quarters, but would scorn the act of shooting even his bitterest enemy from a distance."

"Our friend the friar is an exception to this rule: I have had ocular demonstration of the fact. It is cowardly assassination any way—a distinction without a difference."

"But old superstition has rendered it the fashion nowadays," he rejoined, with a jaunty, careless air; as, bowing, he replaced his cigar, and left me.

That night we had a joyous househeating in the citadel. Our foragers came unexpectedly upon a stock of choice old wine, which De Bourmont had been reserving in some of the cool, dark cellars—probably for his own particular use. He had doubtless come by them as lightly as we did; his soldiers having plundered every house in and about Crotona. But Macleod, his successor, set the casks abroach; and the wine flowed as from a fountain.

His own officers, accustomed to the potent aquavitæ of their native hills, were seasoned topers, and imbibed the juice of the "Tuscan grape" and the light wines of Cyprus and Sicily as if it were water; but most of the Chasseurs Britanniques and the *Amphion's* men lay beneath the table when the morning sun peeped in upon the scene of their orgies.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANOTHER DESPATCH.

On the evening of the next day Macleod put into my hand a despatch for the general, containing an account of the capture of Crotona, with a list of the prisoners, stores, and casualties. With this document I had to set out forthwith for the castle of Scylla, where Sir John Stewart, with the brigade of Colonel Oswald, was pushing the siege in person against a French garrison, which made a most resolute defence. The French soldiers were commanded by the Marchese di Monteleone, who, by some unaccountable means, had passed the piquets of the Masse, and contrived to reach the fortress from the distant camp at Cassano; his known bravery well entitled him to assume the command.

At first I was chagrined at the idea of a journey of more than a hundred miles through such an extraordinary country; but, understanding that Marco of

Castelermo had offered to be my guide and companion by the way (and on my return, if necessary), I looked forward to the long ride as a probable source of pleasant and exciting adventures; for every day brought forth something new and stirring during our campaign in these turbulent provinces, and every rood of ground over which we marched was rich in the recollections of the past.

The morning gun aroused me next day by dawn, and with alacrity I quitted my couch, which consisted of nothing more luxurious than a wooden bench and my horse-cloak.

Through the open iron lattice the brightening east gave promise of another glorious Italian day; a cold, grey light spread over the sky, distinctly revealing the most distant points of the scenery even so far as the peaks of Santa Severina, (famous for that wine which Pliny of old so much commended), and the little city of Strongoli perched on the summit of a lofty mountain rising up abruptly from the shores of the Ionian sea. The sun was yet far below the horizon, and the streets of Crotona, the dark courts and blood-stained walls of the citadel, were yet gloomy, silent, and still. Masses of shattered masonry, splinters of shells, scattered shot, broken gun-carriages, with here and there a corpse which our fatigue parties had not yet removed, and coagulated pools of blood crusted on the pavement of platform and parapet, yet met the eye, attesting the valour of the garrison and the slaughter of the siege. With his plaid and feathers fluttering on the breeze, a sentinel of the Ross-shire Buffs trod to and fro by the flag-staff, and the hour being early, and no one stirring, he chanted a song to cheer his lonely post; he sang of a land which had more charms for him than bright Ausonia, and his thoughts were amid the pathless glens and savage solitudes of Ross.

The clatter of hoofs on the pavement, as our horses were led into the court, and the appearance of the tall figure of il Cavaliere di Malta, muffled in an ample black cloak with a scarlet cross, and booted and spurred for the road, made me hurry forth to meet him.

"Now, signor," said Marco, as he put his foot in the stirrup, "look well to your girths and pistols, for we may have often to trust more to our horses' heels and a flying shot than to downright valour. Many a mile of wild wood, deep morass, mountain gorge and desert plain, must be passed between this and Scylla; and it is very unlikely that we shall be permitted to travel so far without having a brawl of some kind."

"I trust your provincial gentlemen of the road will not find us quite unprepared, at all events," said I, leaping into my saddle, and examining my holsters.

"Basta! for myself I care little, being able to keep any man at arm's length; but in a gorge like la Syla, hedged by the rifles of a thousand banditti, the wisest policy is to take off one's hat. The country through which we must pass swarms with the followers of Scarolla, Frà Diavolo, Benincasa, Gaetano Mammone, and

lastly, the terrible Francatripa, the king of St. Eufemio."

"And on each of these matchless vagabonds, the court of Palermo has bestowed the star of St. Constantino, and a colonel's commission!"

"On all, save the horrible Scarolla."

"But Francatripa is said to be chivalrous and brave, and a perfect hero of romance, though a mountain robber."

"You may chance to find him an incarnate fiend!" said Castelermo, as we rode off: "ay, worse than a fiend if it suits his humour; and as for chivalry, basta! I cannot see any in a bearded capobandito, with satan in his heart, and a belt round him garnished with poniards and pistols. Yet Francatripa's actions are formed after a noble model: it is his greatest pride to be considered like poor Marco Sciarra, Re-della Campagna."

"*He* was a prince among Italian bandits! I remember having read that once in the mountains of Abruzzo, his band plundered a poor wayfarer, whom they bound with cords and brought before him.

"Well, signor," said the robber king, "what are you?"

"Only a poor poet, Messer Marco."

"Good!" replied the other, his frown relaxing.

"Your name?'

"Torquato Tasso of Sorrento."

"What! the author of——"

"Gierusalemme Liberata," said the prisoner, bowing profoundly. A shout of acclamation burst from the band, and the 'king of the open country' knelt on the sod, kissed the hand of the poet, and restoring to him his baggage, escorted him in person beyond the dangerous passes of the mountains.

"All this, and much more, I have heard in the nursery; but as neither of us happen to be a Tasso, and king Marco has long since gone to the shades, any adventure we may have with his successors and imitators will not terminate so pleasantly. Look there, signor, and behold a competition of minstrels! Hark! we shall hear music equalling the pipe of Hermes!"

Under the vine-covered verandah of a cantina, sat six or eight of the Chasseurs Britanniques, and Free Calabrians, who, by the red appearance of their eyes, had evidently been carousing all night, and were yet dreaming over their half-drained flagons; while the empty jars, cards and dice scattered on the board, informed us that they had enjoyed the night so merrily that they were not yet inclined to separate.

An itinerant performer on the zampogna, or Italian bagpipe, was playing for the entertainment of the drowsy revellers, when a gigantic Scot in dark tartan, one of Macleod's regimental pipers, passed by on his way to the Strada Larga, to play a rouse for the soldiers billeted there. Stopping before the cantina, the Scot-

tish piper surveyed with surprise and curiosity the little chanter and inflated skin of the Calabrian's primitive bagpipe; while at the music of this feeble reed, the face of the Highlander gradually contracted, from a ludicrous expression of wonder, to a formidable scowl of Gaelic contempt. He threw the three long drones of the great war-pipe over his left shoulder, and puffing up its mighty bag, in an instant poured forth the wild northern pibroch of the race of Seaforth. The strange variations and tremendous din of the Highland bagpipe astounded the poor little zampognatore, whose notes were lost amid the shrill and sonorous tempest which poured forth so volubly from the pipe of the Highlander; whom he regarded for a time with a droll look of silent wonder, and then slank away, retreating backwards, while his stalwart rival strode after him, taking step for step, and blowing fiercely, as he literally "walked into" the discomfited Italian.

Discordant as the "war-note" of clan Kenneth must have been to the nice Italian ear of Castelermo, he would fain have stayed to listen; but his fiery Neapolitan horse had no such inclination: after snorting and prancing, it set off at a speed which soon left far behind the towers and ramparts of Crotona.

During the cool morning our ride was a very pleasant one, as the road lay through a level part of the country, covered with rich crops and studded with little villages and olive groves, interspersed with lofty elms and clumps of pale green willow overhanging gurgling rivulets; but the scene changed as we penetrated among the mountains, where we rode on for miles without encountering a human being, save perhaps some smoke-begrimed charcoal-burner, or bandit-like peasant, in pursuit of the red deer which abound in those wild places. At times the road wound between the green and solitary hills, through gorges like the bed of a dried up river, where the rocks frowned grimly, rising up on each side like walls of basalt or iron: but they were not devoid of beauty, for in their clefts flourished the daphne and the rhododendron, blue monk's-hood, pink foxglove, and the whortle-berry; while the bronze masses of dark Italian pines shed their sombre influence over the scene from the summit of the cliffs above.

The scorching heat soon compelled us to take shelter in the hut of a shepherd during the sultry noon. We met him on the lonely mountains with his flock of goats, the tinkle of whose brass bells awoke the echoes of the hollow valley whence they were ascending. He walked lazily in front, playing drowsily on the zampogna, and the herded flock followed in close order behind, drawn after him either by the charms of his pipe, or by the dread of a sharp-nosed sheepdog with long white hair, who formed the rear guard, and watched his fleecy charge with red ferret-like eyes. His poor cabin could afford us nothing more than a morsel of coarse cake, a handful of olives, and the manna or congealed dew, which in the morning is gathered on the mulberry leaves in Calabria; in lieu of wine we had a draught of the limpid water that gurgled from a rustic fount, supplying the

duct or hollowed tree that lay before the door, and was half buried in the turf for the convenience of his flock.

The shepherd was clad in a doublet and waistcoat of rough undressed skins with the wool outside, fastened by ties of thong or horn buttons, red cotton breeches, and a broad-leafed hat of plaited straw adorned with a clay image of the Madonna; long uncombed locks waved in sable masses on his brawny breast and muscular neck, which like his legs and feet were sunburnt and bare; a pouch and knife hung at his girdle, and his face, which perhaps had never been touched by a razor, was fringed by a short and thick black beard. In ideas and manners he was perhaps little different from the shepherds who inhabited these very mountains when the trumpets of Hannibal awoke their echoes; only he prayed not to "thundering Jove" but to Madonna, believed in the miracles of St. Hugh and the holy Eufemio instead of the amours and valorous deeds of Pan, and kept Lent in lieu of the *Lupercalia* of the Latins.

"Everything here seems centuries behind northern Italy, in the march of civilization," I observed to my friend and cicerone.

"Truly we have got amongst fauns and satyrs here," replied Castelermo, as he drank from a pitcher of cold water with no very satisfied air. "Basta! was the Arcadia of Virgil like this? Hark you, Signor Menalcas (if that be your name), does not the villa Belcastro lie somewhere near these wild mountains?'

"Yes, illustrissimo," replied the poor rustic, quite abashed by the hauteur of the Maltese knight; "about a league beyond the Tacina, among the wooded hills."

"Good! I hope we shall procure better quarters and entertainment than this poor den can afford."

"I have been often plundered by the French marauders, signor," said the goat-herd humbly.

"And this villa Belcastro: do you know the way to it?"

"Yes, Signor Cavaliere; but a thousand golden ducats would not bribe me to be your guide thither!"

"Why so, fool?"

"My shoulders ache at the recollection of the scurlada. The Cavaliere di Belcastro——"

"Has a very bad name in the neighbourhood. Ah! I heard that even at Palermo. And so, Signor Sylvanus——"

"*My* name is Renzo Grolle," said the herd, angrily. "The sbirri at the villa allow no one to approach within rifle shot of the gates; as the noble signor makes the French war a pretext for many an act of oppression. I was scourged like a mule for leading a poor monk of Cassano there a few days ago: and yet, perhaps he proved no unwelcome guest. Whom think you he was, illustrissimo? Why, the great Marchese di Monteleone in disguise; and on his way to Scylla! Madonna!

I discovered that afterwards, when he was beyond the reach of my knife! His excellenza of Belcastro can act the robber, as well as the king of St. Eufemio: but, perhaps, the less I say the safer for myself, and I trust to your honour in being scatheless for what I have said already. His dungeons are deep; and I am but a poor peasant, whom he might crush by a word."

"At this age of the world, can such things be?" asked I, touched by the poor man's terror and humility. "A devil of a fellow this: we will pay him a visit out of pure spite. What say you, Signor Marco?"

"By all means," replied the cavalier, as we took the road again. "His sbirri will scarcely dare to fire on me; and we can make our quarters good in the king's name. Basta! let Signor Belcastro look to himself, if swords are drawn: I believe I have met him before, and if my suspicions are just, I shall not spare steel on him."

"There is then some story connected with him?"

"And to the old tune,—Italian jealousy. He is said to be married to a beautiful Neapolitan, whom he espoused during a sudden love-fit; but in consequence of some trifling affair when residing at Venice during the carnival, he became inflamed with jealousy, like an old fashioned husband of the "Ancient Tales," and poniarded an officer of the Dogale Guard. Bringing his lady into this wild country, he has ever since kept her a close prisoner, and held himself in such strict seclusion, that his residence was unmolested by the French; but only because it was unknown to them: or perhaps he is an ally; for Buonaparte, anxious to root out from Italy the last traces of the feudal system, has given Regnier orders to demolish every castle and fortified villa in the Calabrias. In one of these ancient dwellings, which can easily be made a strong place for defence, Belcastro keeps his beautiful wife a close captive. I doubt not but she has been perfidious: in the course of my intrigues with the sex, I have found more than one woman so!"

"I have always heard, signor, that you were somewhat too sarcastic on the good faith of your dark-eyed countrywomen."

"By Sant Ermo! I have cause to be so," he replied, while his dark brows contracted, as they always did when he was in the least excited, and his eyes sparkled fire from beneath the shade of his black velvet baretta or forage cap, which was adorned with the Maltese cross, and the letters, I.H.S. in red enamel. "There was a time," he continued, half communing with himself, "when I was the gayest cavalier on the Corso of Naples, or the Marina of Palermo. It was generally allowed that none dressed more gaily, rode more gracefully, played and drank more deeply than Marco of Castelermo. No man's opinion went further in all matters of taste, fashion, or dissipation; whether it was given on a new collection of antiques or paintings, a choice of wines, a racehorse, a new carriage, or the belle of the season. My word was a fiat in the fashionable world. Basta! I was not then a commander of Malta. God and St. John forgive me! if it was rather

in a sinful spirit of revenge and chagrin than a holy sentiment of veneration and religion, that I girded on the sword and mantle of that most sacred brotherhood. There is a pleasure, a morbid one though it be, in telling one's griefs; and since you have half acknowledged to me your passion for the fair cousin of my friend Santugo" (I had never told this sharp-sighted Italian a word about it), "I should not behave with more reserve to you."

He paused for a moment: old recollections, long forgotten but once-cherished sentiments, hopes and fears arose in quick array before him; and his dark and noble features became flushed, as with that lively frankness which so often characterizes the better classes of his countrymen, he commenced as follows.

CHAPTER XIX.

NARRATIVE OF CASTELERMO.

It was in the church of the Holy Spirit at Naples, during vespers, that I first beheld Despina Vignola, then in the first year of her novitiate. It is said that the beauty of our Italian women soon fades; it may be so: I am no traveller and cannot judge; but all must acknowledge that their charms, while they last, are often truly dazzling. Such were Despina's. To me she seemed a personification of all that is lovely in woman: her bright brown hair was gathered up behind in many an ample braid, while a mass of glossy ringlets clustered round her high pale forehead and waved on her fair neck. A robe of white satin fell in deep broad folds around her figure, leaving her polished shoulders and taper arms uncovered from the braceleted wrist to the dimpled elbow. The graces of her person were displayed to the utmost advantage by the richness of her attire; for it was not the custom of the fashionable convent of Santo Spirito to robe the novices in the grim paraphernalia of the cloister: until the vows were taken, they always appeared at mass in full dress.

Despina was formed for love and life, not for the nun's veil and cloistered cell; to which, according to a custom too common in Italian families, she had been vowed in infancy by her parents. It was my fate to love her passionately and truly, when few others would have dared to look impurely upon the affianced bride of Heaven: one from her childhood vowed to Madonna. She was an orphan, and her guardians—an avaricious aunt, and Ser Vignola, a rascally notary of the

Strada di Toledo—to procure the reversion of her little patrimony, kept before her continually the enormity of not fulfilling the vows of her parents.

In Italy, one is more prone to fall in love at church than any other place: this may perhaps account for the numerous intrigues of our female ecclesiastics. There is a mysterious influence in our religious service—a mixture of heavenly aspirations and earth-born delights, which powerfully awakens the better feelings of our nature; softening the heart and rendering it more sensitive to tender and lasting impressions. Was it not at church that Petrarch first beheld the bright-haired Laura, whose beauty shed a light on his pilgrimage through life for twenty years after? Ah, signor! our holy religion belongs to the days of poetry and romance!

None but an Italian can know what a first love is to an Italian heart; or how ardently and wildly the tender passion burns beneath these sunny skies. In those days I was a young alfiero (or ensign) in Florestan's Battalion of the Guards, and my daily attendance at the church of Spirito Santo soon became a standing jest at our mess and a topic for laughter to my gay companions; who were quite at a loss to comprehend the reason of such sudden and rigid attendance to the duties of religion. An aged aunt of mine, who departed about that time in all the glory of virginity, out of her admiration of my piety put a codicil to her will by which 50,000 ducats became mine, instead of being poured into the treasury of the Greek Padri of St. Basil, as she had first intended.

While kneeling beside the envious iron grille which separated me from Despina, and kept all profane sinners from the vicinity of the fair vestals, I felt happiness even at being so near her—to hear her soft breathing, her low responses, and the rustle of her satin dress—to watch the heaving breast, the long lashes of the downcast eye, and the beauty of those auburn ringlets, which seemed "interwoven by the fingers of love!" as Petrarch has it. O, Madonna mia! these were the pure aspirations of a young and gallant heart. But alas! how were they responded to?—how requited? I will not trouble you with much more of this; though love quickens a fertile imagination, and I could relate a thousand devices formed to gain the attention of the beautiful novice: which all proved vain. She kept her long eye lashes cast down and her bright eyes obstinately fixed on the monotonous pages of her mass book; which she affected to prefer to the gayest cavalier on the corso: for such I considered myself in those days of youth and vanity; and certainly my cap had the tallest feather, my belt the longest sword, and my uniform the smartest cut in all Naples. We all know how passion is inflamed by difficulty; and from the time she left the church after vespers, until the moment of beholding her again at matins, ages seemed to elapse: but they were ages of scheming, contrivance, and stratagem.

The abbess, who was Despina's near relative, soon suspected the object of

my devotion was an earthly, and not a heavenly virgin; she was an acute Calabrian and watched me attentively: in short, the fair novice appeared at matins, mass, and vespers no more.

But the ingenuity of Monsignore Cupid, is fully a match for all the cold precautions of guardians and enemies. Daily and nightly I came with my friend Santugo (then a joyous student, fresh from the University of Naples) to survey the lofty walls, the iron portal, and grated loopholes of the convent with the faint hope of beholding her; but, corpo di Baccho! we might as well have looked down the crater of Vesuvius, the flames from whose summit often lighted up our nightly patrols. In short, signor, with a key of gold I gained over the portress, who conveyed to Despina a most elaborately written letter: a ring, bearing her initials, D.V., was my only answer. Croce di Malta! Even at this distant hour, the recollection of the joyous moment when I first received it, stirs up a tumult within me! After that we used to meet in the convent garden every night, but only for a few moments.

Dupe that I was to believe this creature loved me! But ah! the happiness of those brief visits will never pass away from my memory. I found Despina as attractive in mind and manners as she was charming in person; she was a joyous donzella, who knew better the poems of Alfieri and Gorilla than the doggrel hymns of the Padri; and while we enjoyed our tête-à-tête in an arbour, Santugo kept watch, perched on the summit of the garden-wall. Often we cursed the villain notary who lent all his influence to crush the blossoms of so fair a flower: but at last my passion took a more noisy turn.

By Santugo's advice, I engaged all the improvisatori in the city to celebrate Despina. I mustered twenty with mandolins, twenty choristers, as many bell-ringers and scrapers on the viol, with all our regimental drums and cymbals. O, what a jovial company! Every other night we entertained the sisterhood with a grand serenade, making all Naples echo with bursts of joyous music; until the abbess, deeming her "commandery" disgraced by our clatter and chorussing, procured a guard of sbirri from the Bishop of Cosenza (whose palace unluckily stood in the adjoining street), and on the first night after this reinforcement we were greeted by a volley of blunderbuss-shot, which was within a hair's-breadth of sending us all to the banks of the Styx. Three choristers were killed, and several wounded. Santugo escaped unhurt, but I was peppered with slugs so severely, that for the next two months I was confined to my apartments; and in the interval Despina took the veil! She either supposed I was dead of my wounds, or deemed me inconstant. Perhaps it was dire necessity, as the last day of her novitiate had expired; and, after a short residence at the house of the notary, to take a last view of the world (as the custom is), she returned to offer up her vows. All the bells of Naples were tolling on the occasion: several novices were to take the veil that

day, and the fashionables flocked to the church of the Holy Spirit, as to some great festival of joy.

"O, Madonna!" exclaimed poor Marco, beating his breast with true Italian energy, "will the bitter recollections of that infernal morning never pass away? The Princess of Squillaci, a damsel old in years, wickedness, and fashionable dissipation, was also to take the vows; and all the foolish city, from Portici on the east to Misenum on the west, held it as a day of universal joy.

While all this was going on, you cannot imagine the agony of mind I endured: weaker than a child, I was prostrated upon a sickbed by a long and wasting illness. My brain was dizzy. I wondered how the sun could shine so joyously on the bay and the city, which lies so magnificently along its spacious margin: to me it was a day of gloomy horror! The bells seemed to toll for the funeral of Despina. My mind was a chaos, and I would have hailed an eruption of Vesuvius, an earthquake, or any horrible convulsion which would have overwhelmed the whole city: but neither came to pass, and I lay stretched on my fever-bed, helpless, forgotten, and miserable. I drank cup after cup of wine; but there seemed a fire within me, which all the waters of the bay would not quench. The pain of my wounds, the wine I drank so rashly, and the fever of mind and body, soon made me delirious, and Santugo alone restrained me from sallying, sword in hand, into the crowded streets, to search for some imaginary foe.

That night, while yet the fever raged within me, and my brain whirled with the champagne I had drank, I arose, dressed, and armed myself, and issuing forth soon found my way to the closed gates of the convent. The streets were silent and dark; my thoughts were strange: even while my head swam and my knees tottered I imagined that I had the strength of a Hercules. Aware that I was mad with fever and wine, my pranks had some of the caution of sanity in them, and I shrank beneath the deep shadow of the cloisters when a passenger approached, or the moon streamed its light between the fleecy clouds which the south-west wind piled in gleaming masses over Naples.

At times I laughed bitterly; anon I wrung my hands, and cried aloud, "Despina—Despina! Anima mia!" and chanted some of our merry madrigals, till the hollow cloisters and the long vista of the empty street, gave back the ravings of folly and despair.

A new fit seized me; I became gloomy, and fled from the city to wander among the ruins of Queen Joanna's palace: a place rendered terrible to the superstitious fishermen by the tales of horror connected with it. From thence I wandered as far as that dreaded valley the Forum Vulcani; a spot filled with fabled terrors from time immemorial, and shunned by the vulgar of Naples. The superstition is that it is haunted by fiends and spirits, who toil and shriek through caverns of fire, watching that hidden gold, which (by day) the wretched lazza-

roni have sought for centuries. At times the ground is covered with burning sulphur, and rent with chasms belching forth pitchy smoke, flames, or boiling water; which the fabled giants who are buried there vomit up from hell. Petrius Damianus supposes that purgatory lies beneath it, and tells of frightful noises, groans, and shrieks, issuing from clefts in the rocks; whereon sat monstrous shapes of birds and men, who, on the croaking of a gigantic raven, plunged headlong into the chasms, and appeared no more, at least not for many days.

At night, when viewed by the light of a setting moon or the flame of Vesuvius, the Forum Vulcani, with only its natural terrors, is gloomy enough: hemmed in by rocks of basalt, from the clefts of which the burning bitumen flashes forth at times, or white steam curls on the breeze—the ground thick with sulphur, and trembling with the throes of the mighty volcano in the distance, it has horrors enough for ordinary men; but that night it had none for me, and I startled the echoes of its rocks with my cries of "Despina!"

I again found myself beneath the convent walls of Spirito Santo, just as the city clocks were telling midnight; I was alone, and a strange thought occurred to me. I tore down a lamp, and demolishing a wooden railing, poured oil on the painted pales, and piling them against the door, set them on fire, laughing, and shouting "Despina!" as I fanned the flames with my hat; and when the blaze increased apace, I folded my arms within my mantle, and watched its rapid progress with the most intense satisfaction. Aim or object I had none: I was *mad!*—and yet I can remember the whole like some wild dream. The forked tongues of flame shot upward, and licked the wooden balconies and projecting eaves of the old convent, which was likely to be soon enveloped in fire. Its magnificent oratory, with columns of jasper and dome of marble—its shrines, tombs, and relics—the miraculous crucifix which spoke to Thomas Aquinas, the true cross, the Virgin's petticoat, and Heaven knows what more—now stood in greater peril than ever they did during the outrages of the mad fisherman of Amalfi.

The lazzaroni came yelling in thousands from every point; the whole Strada di Toledo was red with the blaze, and the Piazza di Mercato, and the façade of the Royal Palace, were all gleaming in light: even the starry vault above was sheeted with sparkling fire. Basta! how I laughed at the roaring flames and the clanking engines, from which the hissing water poured in streams—at the shrieking nuns, the shouting mob, and all the mingled dismay and uproar I had so suddenly caused. But, being soon discovered to be the author of the mischief, I was carried off by the Neapolitan guard, and lodged in prison; where three months' close confinement, with no other fare than hard crusts and cold water, cooled my blood so completely, that I came forth an altered man, and so heartily ashamed of my late extravaganza, that I resigned to the Duca di Florestan my commission in his battalion of the guards, and left the service.

With liberty, all my love for Despina returned; and circumstances which followed soon after raised my passion to its former height and ardour. One morning, on awaking, I found a little coloured billet laid on my pillow; tearing it open with hurried and trembling hands, I found it to be an invitation—from whom?—the Signora Abadessa of Spirito Santo, to visit her at my earliest convenience. How the little pink note came there, no one knew; and I was too much fluttered to inquire. There was an air of mystery in the affair that pleased me; and love and hope sprang up again. But aware that I had the treachery and revenge of a Calabrian woman to dread, together with the wrath of her gossip and well-known admirer the famous Bishop of Cosenza, I went well armed, taking a matchless poniard of Bastia steel in addition to my concealed pistols. Happily, however, such precautions were needless. I found the gay abbess an agreeable little woman; she gave me her hand to kiss, and welcomed me with a pleasant talkative manner which quite won me to her purpose. After rebuking me gently for my sacrilegious attempt to fire her convent, she bade me kneel to receive her blessing. I listened to her rebuke and received her benison in silence and distrust, wondering the whole time how so unusual an interview was to end. I thought of the bishop's sbirri, and the dungeons of the convent below us, and kept one hand in my bosom grasping my poniard.

The reverend lady began by a long preamble on the risk she ran in the disclosure she was about to make regarding the sister Brigida, as she named Despina; and then, making a long pause, she kept me on thorns of expectation, while observing with a keen glance the expression of my care-worn visage. I could not love Despina (the abbess continued) more than I was beloved in return; and taking pity upon me, she had consented to quit the convent, and become my bride, the moment I procured her a dispensation from those vows which bound her to the church—vows offered up on the expiry of her novitiate, and in an agony of sorrow for my supposed death. Blessed words! But they were my ruin! My brain whirled and my heart leaped with delight; throwing myself at the feet of the abbess, and pressing both her hands to my lips, I declared her my best friend—my good angel, and bestowed on her a thousand of those titles which flow so smoothly from an Italian's tongue, when his heart is overflowing with gratitude.

She rang a hand-bell, and the light form of Despina appeared at the iron grating of the parlour. I sprang towards her, but she averted her face: at first it was very pale, and seemed more lovely beneath the dark hood which shaded it; but a mantling blush overspread her cheek as she gave me her hand through the grating to kiss.

"Ah, Despina! had you trusted more to Providence, how much sorrow might have been spared us both!"

"True, dear one," said she, wafting me a kiss through the grate.

The superior hurried me away, and I left the convent giddy with delight at the sudden turn fortune had taken in my favour. Within the hour, I wrote to my uncle, the great Cardinal Ruffo, to intercede with his Holiness, and procure a dispensation for Despina; and I spent nearly my whole inheritance in bribing the greedy officials at the Papal court to hasten it, trusting; to God and mv own hands for the means of maintenance when Despina became mine. Meanwhile, I visited the convent daily, and though my interviews with her were very short, I became more than ever enchanted with her beauty and vivacity; which seemed to increase as the time flew past, and the day of her freedom and our happiness drew nearer.

Often have I whiled away the hours of a starry night in the Toledo, watching the taper which flickered in her dormitory; and I retired happy if I did but obtain even a glance of her figure passing the lattice. One night, while watching thus, a tall dark shadow fell on the muslin curtains of the window: it was *not* that of Despina. I paused—horrible suspicions floated before me, and I felt my blood run cold. The light vanished, the chamber became dark, and immediately a tall fellow dropped from the window into the street. My heart, which had ceased to beat for a time, was now on fire: the blood shot through my veins like lightning; my poniard gleamed in my hand.

"Olà, signor cavaliere!" cried I, crossing his path; "who are you that leaves the convent thus, and under the shadow of night?"

"One who will not brook questioning by you, whoever you are, per Baccho!" replied the other, drawing his hat over his eyes, and standing on his guard, with a poniard also. "Let me pass, cursed lazzarone! or it may be the worse for you."

Jealousy, anguish, and hatred, burned fiercely within me, and I rushed upon him with frantic vehemence. Parrying his blow with my mantle, I, with truer aim, slashed up his face from cheek to chin. My antagonist fled, uttering a terrible malediction.

"Basta!" said I, while wiping my weapon, "he is only some craven robber after all! Thank heaven! my suspicions were vain. But her window!—I must have mistaken it—and yet the shadow—." A tumult of sad thoughts overwhelmed me, and I slept none that night, but wandered about the Toledo like a houseless dog. Sunrise found me at the parlour grate of the convent.

Despina appeared as usual, her eyes beaming with smiles expressive of equal pleasure and surprise on beholding me so early. The fair recluse, who had just arisen from her pure and peaceful couch, seemed so blooming—so fragrant—with beauty, youth, and innocence, that I cursed my vile suspicions, and concluded the strange visitor of the convent to have been a robber.

Three days afterwards, my uncle, the Cardinal Ruffo, sent a dispensation

for Despina to the convent. I heard of its arrival, and with a heart brimming with exultation, I flew to embrace my inamorata. On hearing my well-known ring at the bell of the porch, Despina was not, as usual, at the grate, nor did the superior appear; but a letter from her lay on the table for me. I tore it open, and read the fatal confirmation of my suspicions: I found that I was the dupe of two of the most artful and inexplicable women in Italy. Despina had eloped! The moment her dispensation had arrived, she quitted the convent in a calesso, accompanied by a masked cavalier, and was gone no one knew whither. The letter concluded by a request that I would visit the convent no more, as the abbess was too much incensed at Despina Vignola to make welcome any one who had ever loved or been connected with her.

The next thing I remembered, was finding myself in the sunny Toledo, and hearing the jarring of the convent's iron doors as they were closed and locked behind me. I tore the letter to fragments, which I scattered on the wind, and rushed through the streets to order forth horses and servants in pursuit—servant, I should say, for my retinue was then curtailed to one. I thought only of revenge. O signor! little can you imagine the agony of rage and shame I endured; not, perhaps, so much from unrequited love as from wounded vanity and pride. Next morning all gossiping Naples rang with the story, and everybody enjoyed a laugh at the famous jilt of the Cavaliere di Castelermo, by a perfidious little nun—per Baccho!

A letter, which I received next day from Cardinal Ruffo, containing abundance of good advice and his blessing on our nuptials, in no way tended to soothe my exasperation. Basta! months elapsed before the shock of this event passed away, and I could listen with calmness to Santugo, who related to me the story of Despina, so far as he had been able to pick it up in the public places of the city.

I had been most cruelly and strangely duped. Anxious to be free from those religious trammels which her parents' bigotry and her guardian's avarice had cast around her, the artful girl—who had never loved me—was willing that I should employ all my interest (which was great) and my money (which, alas! was little) to procure her a dispensation, that she might espouse the brother of that diavolessa the superior. He was a ruined cavalier of the Calabrias, who had lost his last ducat at the hells, and to whom the reversion of her entry-money from the convent-treasury would be very acceptable: though the beauty of the girl was temptation enough.

"Basta!" said I, "Santugo, 'tis enough!" I inquired after her and her choice no more; but strove to banish the affair from my mind, when the first burst of my fury had passed away. Luckily, I had been taught philosophy, and bequeathing to the devil my share in the sex, found that I had not much more to bestow: I had not a quattrino, save what I raised by the sale of the remnant of my patrimony—

the tower of St. Ermo in the upper province. Santugo would have shared his last ducat with me; but I was too proud to be dependent on any man. My legacy, the reward of my devotion, had all melted away, too, during my joyous life in the Guards: it was spent in procuring a wife for another man! I wish him joy of his spouse: if she proved as virtuous after marriage as she was before it, she must be a crown—but not of glory—to her husband. Basta!

Finding myself without one beggarly bajoccho to clink upon another, I became a soldier again, and served the Knights of Malta as a musketeer against the corsairs of Barbary. On the return of our frigate to Malta, after a most successful cruise, in which we obtained abundance of plunder, slaves, and glory, I was admitted into the Italian Langue; on proving before a chapter of the order that my blood had been noble for two hundred years (easy enough for one who comes of a senatorial family), and that in my coat armorial there were the blazons of four patrician houses. A little prize-money picked up in Algeria furnished me with two hundred and sixty golden crowns, to pay my fees of diploma on passing from esquire to the rank of spurred and belted knight. In this capacity, when in command of a frigate, I defeated Osmin Carara, the celebrated corsair who so long infested these seas; and for that exploit I was made bailiff of the commandery at St. Eufemio, then consisting of sixty knights, the noblest in Italy.

So, signor, you now behold me a brother of the most reverend and illustrious order of St. John of Jerusalem, once of Rhodes, and latterly of Malta. After the reduction by Buonaparte of that barren rock (the last stronghold of the order), I retired with his most eminent highness the grand master, and the poor remnant of our forces, to Genoa; where our solemn chapters are yet held. On the breaking out of the Italian war, when the French crossed our frontier to plant their banner of blood and anarchy on the ramparts of Rome—to assail God's vicegerent in his own eternal city, drive the Bourbon king from Naples, hoist their red cap above the winged horse, and establish a republic of injustice and tyranny—then I once more girded on the sword, and have ever since been fighting; at one time under the chiefs of the Masse, at another under the British: but, alas! oftener under Francatripa and other bold bandits of Naples; who seem to be the only men truly staunch to Italy in these days of war and peril. Malediction on the hour when a wearer of this blessed badge has to stoop to a companionship so unworthy! But the end sanctifies the means. * * *

There is the Villa Belcastro! If my story has beguiled a part of the way through this wild and mountainous country, I shall consider myself amply repaid in having pleased you: but I fear, Signor Claude, you have found it dry enough;

though the tale is a sad one to me—the most dismal chapter of my history indeed.

CHAPTER XX.
THE VILLA BELCASTRO.

"Where is the path? It seems lost in the wilderness hereabout," said I, when my communicative friend had concluded.

"Yonder woman at the fountain will perhaps show us the way to the gate. Permit me to pass," replied the cavalier, as he spurred his horse to the front, and galloped before me: his tall military figure, and peculiar garb and equipment, with the solitary wild around us—the castellated villa, and the lonely hills—had an air of romance with which my red coat, jack-boots, and most unchivalric cocked-hat, but ill consorted.

The country through which we had travelled was of the most picturesque character: lofty mountains rose up against the blue vault, which they seemed to sustain; they were covered to their summits with the light foliage of the olive, the heavy branches of the sombre pine, the broad masses of the glossy-leaved ilex, fragrant myrtle, rich arbutus, orange and lemon groves, all flourishing in the wildest luxuriance; while the aloe, the cactus, and date-palm, grew among the ferruginous rocks in profusion. Little hamlets, inhabited only by charcoal-burners, nestled in lonely nooks; solitary chapels, old crosses marking deeds of blood or piety, and the mouldering ruins of long-departed races—the Calabri or the Locri—appeared half-hidden amid the long reedy grass, in the flat alluvial vales through which the roadway wound.

But on nearing the Villa Belcastro a change came over the scenery: the country seemed deserted, or inhabited only by the lynx, the wolf, and wild boar; muddy cascades roared down over the red scaurs of the mountains; and a wide pathless wood of dark Italian pines and tall cypresses, sombre and gloomy, surrounded the ancient edifice. The picturesque towers of the villa were perched on the summit of a rock that reared up its jagged front immediately before us; but we were unable to penetrate the tangled growth of underwood that intervened, so thickly interwoven with creeping wild plants that it seemed like an Indian jungle. Buffaloes—a species of cattle introduced into Italy during the seventh, century—browsed in the marshy places, and at times a lynx or polecat shot through the forest, or an eagle screamed from the rocks.

The white walls and striking façade of the villa shone in the warm light of the western sky, and from one of the four turrets at the angles of the edifice, which were covered with elaborate stonework projecting like a heavy cornice, we saw a standard slowly hoisted and unfurled to the breeze. Our scarlet uniforms had probably led the inmates to suppose that British troops were in the valley below.

"Basta!" exclaimed Castelermo, "'tis the veritable castle of an ogre this! Cavaliere Galdino must be seldom troubled with visitors. I see not a trace of road or pathway to his hermitage on the cliffs yonder."

"I trust we shall reach it before nightfall: a ride in the dark through such a wilderness would not be very pleasant, and evening is closing fast."

While I was speaking, the last segment of the sun's crimson disk sank behind the green ridge of hills from which we had descended; the long, dark shadow cast by the villa-crowned rock across the wooded valley faded away; the Apennines grew dark, and the sombre tints of evening deepened rapidly.

"Signora," said Castelermo to an old woman who was filling a jar at a fountain, and whose grim aspect declared her to be the spouse of a charcoal-burner, "is there any path to the villa on this side of the mountains?"

"Through the woods there is a way, signor cavaliere," said the woman, setting down her jar, and endeavouring to hide her bare bosom; for her attire was of the most wretched description. "But it is a troublesome road, and perilous too; and you will only lose your labour—for none get entrance there. The sbirri keep guard day and night with their rifles loaded; and more than one poor peasant has been shot—mistaken for a Frenchman, perhaps.

"So the cavaliere yet contrives to maintain his quota of sbirri in arms?" said Marco.

"Yes, signor illustrissimo," replied the poor woman, glancing furtively round her; "but, ahimé! such ruffians! They are slaves who have escaped, bravoes, banditti, and the worst malefactors of Naples, who wear his livery; and, bearing arms in his name, they commit such outrages that the very relation would make you shudder, cavalieri!"

"A droll country gentleman!" I exclaimed. "And he will not admit any one, say you?"

"None save the accursed witches who come all the way from the peak of Fiesole to hold their Sabbath with him."

"Ay! and devils from the Val di Demona, to bring distempers on our blessed infants!" cried another hag, starting up from behind the fountain, where she had shrunk down to conceal the scantiness of her attire, which consisted only of a red sottana, or coarse petticoat, and leather sandals; "and to blast our crops and herds, and make the fiends who dwell in the bowels of the mountains rend the

solid earth, and shake our huts to pieces."

"Madonna! speak lower! he is told whatever is said of him by the sybil of Norcia, who made him proof against fire and steel and water."

"I care not. I am alone in the world now: my husband died on Regnier's gibbet at Monteleone, and my sons have perished fighting under the chiefs of the Masse, Gésu Cristo! I am old, lonely, and very miserable!"

"Proof against steel did you say, signora?" said I, addressing the first gossip; "we may test that, if he plays any of his pranks with us."

"Signor, heard you ever such stuff?" exclaimed Castelermo, while our horses drank of the well, and we enjoyed a hearty laugh at the excessive credulity of the Calabrians; to whose wild superstitions, I was by that time no stranger. "Old gossips," he continued, putting some silver into their attenuated hands to quicken their apprehension: "for what reason does this terrible Feudatory keep garrison so closely? Nay, speak one at a time, but as quickly as you please: our time is short."

"You must have come from a distant country, illustrissimi signori, that you have not heard of the poor Cavalieressa Belcastro," said one of the old women, taking her jar from her head, on which she had poised it, and replacing it on the margin of the well, to point the periods with her fingers while speaking. "There is not a child on this side of La Syla, but knows her story. Some people say her husband stole her from a convent; others that she left a noble signor whom she loved better, and married the Cavaliere Belcastro for the sake of his rank."

"His rank!" reiterated Marco contemptuously, his brows contracting: "Yet, I may mistake—proceed."

"After marriage came repentance, and the Signor Belcastro was tormented by jealousy; believing that a woman who was false to another could never be very true to himself. And truly he had proof of her light carriage with a handsome young captain, who was carried away to the Val di Demona by those imps who are always at the signor's elbow awaiting his commands. Since then he has kept the poor lady locked up in a dreary chamber of the Villa, from which he brings her forth but once a week to go to mass on horseback; and she is so strictly watched that, notwithstanding three attempts made by the brave capobandito, Scarolla, she yet remains a captive."

"Watched by a spirit, who will never leave her till the cavalier dies and Satan claims his own," added the other woman.

"Malediction on such husbands!" exclaimed the first gossip; "if my Maso treated me so, I would put a dose of aquetta in his soup—I would! He was jealous once; but we were young then, and I soon soothed him."

"How the terror of this man's name has besotted these poor simpletons," said Marco, as we rode through the wood along a narrow path they had pointed

out. "He is said to be a dark and curious being; and, leaving out the sorcery, their relation is almost word for word what I have heard at Naples and Palermo. I would stake a thousand ducats to a bajoccho, we shall have an unseemly brawl with this melancholy Castellano; unless his character is much exaggerated."

"Indeed! For my own part I would willingly stake a cool hundred, if I could serve the poor lady."

"Of the signora, the less we say perhaps the better; though I feel some curiosity to know her maiden name and family, and a great deal to see the inside of this place: to which we are venturing, like two rash knights, after the solemn warnings of yonder Cumæan sybils. I perceive them still watching our route, as if it was beset with as many perils as any in the 'Hundred ancient Tales.'

"By Jove, sir, they are not much mistaken!" I exclaimed, as a musket flashed from a loophole in the outer wall, and the shot whistled over my shoulder.

"May I perish if this shall pass unrevenged!" exclaimed the cavalier. "Basta! let us forward, and at full gallop!"

In a minute we were close under the walls, the outer windows of which were all barred and far from the ground. An iron gate closed the portal, or archway; and beyond it we saw ten or twelve sinister-looking ruffians, clad in a sort of livery, and armed with black cross belts, musquetoons and bayonets.

"Rascals!" exclaimed my companion; "are ye Italians, true catholics, and yet ignorant that it is sacrilege to molest one of the Sangiovanni? In the days of the holy office, this must have been settled otherwise; even in Calabria. But open the barrier and give us instant admission, or it may fare the worse with your lord; to whom we must speak, and without delay."

The porter, an old Albanian Greek, who trembled between fear of disobeying his master's orders and offending a knight of Malta—an order lately so formidable—slowly undid the bolts and chains; imploring, in his curious dialect, that we would soften the wrath of the Cavalier Galdino, and save his shoulders from the scurlada. Until the French invasion, the resident Feudatories of Calabria, Apulia, &c. maintained the feudal system with all its iron tyranny; but since the frightful war of extermination, waged in these provinces by General Manhes, and the peace of 1815, it does not exist in any of the Italian states: except, I believe, the island of Sardinia. Between the tyranny and oppression of the barons and their armed followers—with whom on various pleas they garrisoned their castles and villas—the dues or tithes of the numerous priesthood and the outrages of the brigands, the situation of the peaceful portion of the mountaineers was not very enviable.

"Which of ye dared to fire upon us? and by whose order?" asked Castelermo, laying his hand on his sword, and surveying the culprits with a stern eye. There was no reply. "Cowards! do you hear me?"

"Cavaliero Marco," said one fellow coming forward hat in hand, after a long pause, "I trust we know our creed better than to molest any man who wears upon his breast the cross of Malta. But, indeed, it was no other than excellenza himself who fired the shot; and let him answer for it."

"The villain!" I exclaimed, leaping from my horse.

"Dio mi guardi! the deed was none of ours, Signor Marco."

"Who are you, that seem so well acquainted with my name?"

"A poor rogue of Amendolia, signor, by name Baptistello Varro. I cannot presume to think you can recollect me, though I had the honour to serve with you, under your uncle the Cardinal Huffo, while his eminence was yet a true man to Italy and the Holy Faith. You remember the siege of Altamurra on the plains of Apulia: you saved my life there. Ah! what a leaguer that was! His eminence built altars where other men would have had batteries, and besprinkled our cannon so plentifully with holy water that they often hung fire. I owe you a life, signor; and an Italian never forgets either a friend or a foe."

"Well, Master Baptistello, although I have no remembrance of those things, I doubt not you are an honest fellow; but the sooner you change leaders the better. Quit this inhospitable den to-morrow, and join the corps of the Free Calabri at Crotona. But, meanwhile, lead us to this ungracious lord of yours. The shot he fired shall cost him dear, or I am not—lead on, Basta!" and with his usual exclamation, he cut short what he meant to have said.

On being ushered up a spacious staircase of white marble, the stained glass windows of which were faintly lighted by the lingering flush of the departed sun, we found ourselves in an ancient hall, decorated in a quaint style of architecture, neither Norman nor Saracenic, but a mixture of both; and a relic perhaps of the days of those invaders. Lighted by four large windows which overlooked the vale and forest, now dimly illumined by the rising moon, its roof was arched with stone profusely carved, and supported by twelve antique figures, or caryatides, which supplied the place of pillars: they were sculptured out of the sonorous marble of Campanini, which when struck is said to resound like a bell; and their time-worn mutilated forms glimmered like pale spectres amid the gloom of evening and the shadows of the darkening hall. By the light of the stars and the moon's wan crescent, we could discern sylvan trophies, sombre paintings from which grim faces of old Italian knights and older saints looked forth, and numerous weapons of various dates which adorned the lofty walls.

"'T is long since I stood in such a noble old hall as this," said Marco, casting himself languidly into a gilt fauteuil. "General Regnier, applying the forcible argument of gunpowder, has done more, perhaps, than the march of civilization, towards destroying the feudal system; and the ancient strongholds and palazzi of our noblesse are now somewhat scarce even in the lower province. We must

be on our guard with this signor of Belcastro," he added in a whisper. "I have often heard of him at Palermo, as being a sullen, subtle, and ferocious man,—a ruined gamester and half desperado—cunning as a lynx, and treacherous as Cesare Borgia. Heaven help the unhappy woman whom fate has tied to him! But, ha! what have we here?" he exclaimed aloud, snatching from a marble slab the long envelope of some official communication, which just then caught his eye, "See you this, Signor Claude? Our villain host has been in correspondence with the enemy."

It was addressed to the "Cavaliere Galdino di Belcastro," and endorsed in the corner "*Regnier, General de Division.*"

"Now, I would give a thousand ducats to know what this contained!" said my companion, as he thrust it into his long glove. "'T is sealed with the crest of the iron crown, and—but Basta! here he comes."

As he spoke, there entered the hall a tall man of powerful frame and most forbidding aspect, attired in the full dress of the old school: his hair powdered and tied with a white riband, his shirt ruffled at the wrists and bosom, a wide skirted coat and black satin knee breeches with buckles. The courtly air which this costume usually imparts to the wearer, rather heightened than diminished the repulsive manner of this tyrannical feudatory.

"Lights here! Olà, Baptistello! a light, you loitering whelp," he cried with the voice of one in no pleasant mood. In less than a minute, servants had lighted the wax candles of three gigantic girandoles, and we had a better view of our host. He was past the meridian of life, and his countenance, which I have already characterized as forbidding, was rendered yet more so by a hideous cicatrix, as from the gash of a sword-cut, which grew purple and black alternately. He bowed to us with frigid hauteur, and then surveyed with a peculiar glance the tall and noble figure of Castelermo. The latter changed colour on beholding the scar, but said with a stern aspect, after a pause,—

"How now, Signor Galdino! do you take me for a lynx, a torpedo, the devil, or what, that you look on me thus?"

"For none of these," he answered, coldly; "but say who are ye, signori, that force yourselves upon my privacy uninvited?"

"I am an officer of his Britannic Majesty's service—Luogoteniente di Fanteria nel servizio Britanica—and a bearer of despatches." The cavaliere bowed.

"And *I* the Cavaliere di Castelermo, Knight Commander of Malta, and an officer of the Free Calabri: as such, I demand your reasons for firing upon us like some base brigand, thus committing both treason and sacrilege."

"By the ancient customs of Calabria, common to the land since the days of Count Roger the First, I may defend my residence against the intrusion of all men. As for the treason, cospetto! I care little whether Buonaparte or Ferdinand

is our ruler; and as for the sacrilege, I can answer for that where, when, and how you will!" His fingers played convulsively with a little stiletto, which hung half concealed beneath the lapelle of his embroidered vest.

"Rest assured, Signor Galdino, that I am not slow in literally translating the hint; but recollect that, as a cavaliere of birth and honour, I would scorn to put my life in the scale with a traitor's!"

"How?" exclaimed Belcastro, starting forward with rage.

Castelermo held before his eyes the paper he had picked up, and our host changed colour beneath the cold, sarcastic smile of the knight. He started as if to summon his people, but paused—a sudden thought seemed to occur to him; he gulped down his fury, his brows became smooth, and a ghastly smile curled his sinister lip.

"Eh, via signori! you are now under my roof; the ways are dangerous hereabout; you cannot proceed; and I must not forget that hospitality which courtesy renders imperative. Let us say no more of that unlucky wall-piece, which in a moment of irritation I discharged. My residence is seldom favoured by peaceful visitors. But are any more of King Ferdinand's people—troops, I mean—likely to pass this way soon?"

"A brigade of British are entering the valley, and will probably arrive here after midnight." Our host looked displeased, and turned to one of the windows, while I glanced inquiringly at Castelermo, who whispered—

"I deemed it politic to say so, for he has some dark end in view. I did not like the sudden and sinister smile which replaced the gloom of his sullen visage. You observed it? By St. John of Malta! were our cattle not tired with these rugged mountain roads, I would rather have passed the night in my saddle than under his roof. A few miles further would have brought us to the town of Belcastro: but there is no help for it now."

My companion was not deceived. Animated by a fear that we had discovered his correspondence with the French leader, and by a wish to possess himself of my despatches to transmit them to the same personage; eager, also, to gratify the deep-rooted hatred he bore to Castelermo, he secretly determined to murder us both, and in cold blood. The bullet or poniard had been his first resolve; but dreading discovery, and the arrival of the supposed brigade, poison became his next resource. But I am anticipating. The change in his manner was too abrupt

and bare-faced to pass without exciting our suspicions.

CHAPTER XXI.
SEQUEL TO THE STORY OF CASTELERMO.

While Signor Belcastro scanned the star-lighted valley to trace the march of those troops whom he had no wish to see, servants laid a hasty supper of various cold meats, boiled maccheroni, and fruit, all of which were very acceptable to the cavaliere and myself; we were well appetized by our ride over the mountains, exposed to a keen tramontana, or north wind, which had been blowing for the last two hours.

"Be seated, gentlemen!" said our host, as he took the head of the table. "Will you not lay aside your swords?"

"We have been so much accustomed to them of late, that mine is no encumbrance."

"Nor mine," said Marco, bestowing on me a glance so peculiar, that I refrained from unclasping my belt. There was so much blunt distrust in this, that the face of Belcastro flushed.

"Shall we not have the pleasure of seeing the signora at supper?" said Marco, as he spread his table napkin, and attacked a plate of cold roasted meat, affecting to be unconscious that he stung Belcastro to the quick by the question.

"I regret that she is indisposed," he replied, regarding the cavalier with furtive glances, his eyes burning like red sparks beneath his shaggy brows; "seriously so: but, indeed, she never appears before visitors."

"So I have heard at Palermo," said Marco, drily, and in the same peculiar tone, while the face of Belcastro grew purple and the gash black; though he continued his supper with apparent composure. "'T is said, signor," continued his tormentor, "that being jealous of her surpassing beauty, you keep her a little too close, after the old Italian fashion. I have heard the captive lady of Belcastro spoken of more than once at the Sicilian court; and truly, but that the days of chivalry are gone by, our grand master would have sent a squadron of his best knights to summon your stronghold——"

"Cavaliere Marco!" said our host, sternly, "those persons at Palermo or elsewhere, who meddle with my affairs, will act a wiser part in attending to their own. Massena is now hovering on the frontiers of Upper Calabria with a force

that must sweep the British from Italy—ay, and from Sicily, too! Where, then, will be the lazzaroni court? Signor, cease your jesting. Cospetto! this is not a time for the courtiers of Ferdinand to create enemies."

There was something in all this beyond my comprehension. I supped rather uncomfortably: some mischief was brewing. Why, I knew not; but the half nonchalant, half contemptuous manner of Castelermo, and the sullen air of Belcastro, were not calculated to make me feel perfectly "at home." The conversation that passed was purely political, and conducted in a very unpleasant style of sarcasm and retort. Our host seemed no friend to the Bourbon cause, and freely abused the character of Ferdinand.

"But glory to Carolina!" he added, "she is worth a legion of such men as her husband; and but for her influence alone, the spirit of resistance (you term it honour and freedom) had long since been scared from Naples by the eagles of Napoleon!"

"'T is a sad truth," said Castelermo, with a sigh. "Oh, that the pure flame of patriotism which burns in my own breast could be kindled in every Italian heart!—that my countrymen, instead of their silly desire for separate dukedoms and independent commonwealths, would cherish a spirit of love and union, and exalt the standard of their country to that place which it once held. Then the Ausonians would become once more a people, like their Latin fathers: the first on earth. Think of the richness of our soil, which yields in abundance all that man can desire; the magnificence of our cities, which have ever been famous for the great men they have produced—historians, politicians, poets, painters, musicians, and sculptors. 'T is the land to which all Europe owes its religion, its civilization, and its laws! But, alas! its spirit is dead; or Italy would become once more a nation, and a great one: not a land of shreds and patches—of principalities, republics, and seignories, pining and withering amid dissensions and jealousies at home, and wars and woes abroad. But Italia! Italia, as she was once—a glorious and united nation—one kingdom from the mountains of Savoy to the Capo del Armi—where would be her equal?"

"Chimera all!" replied Belcastro, coolly draining a glass of wine; while Marco, whose eyes sparkled, and whose cheek flushed scarlet during this outburst, continued with a tone of sadness—

"I know it. Never will her people or her wicked rulers be aware of this: as Austria is, and other nations are, whose interest it is to keep Italy feeble, partitioned, and divided."

"Europe must bow to France," said Belcastro, who was a confirmed Buonapartist. "Look around us! Ferdinand styles himself King of Naples and of Sicily: whether he is likely to keep that little long, even though protected by the fleets and armies of Britain, is very problematical. You fight for his crown here among

the wilds of Calabria, while he spends his days ingloriously at Palermo; and instead of leading on his Italians to battle, to gain a kingdom or a grave, he hunts in the woods of Sicily, clad in a grey doublet, greasy cap and worsted hose, like some ignoble peasant rather than the son of Charles of Parma and Placentia. In truth, he is the most cowardly, ignorant, and indolent sloth on this side of the Alps. His feeble cause would expire altogether, but for the indomitable spirit of Carolina of Austria; who is the very reverse of such a husband: her presence at the council-table, when fired with ardour and indignation against the destroyers of her sister Marie Antoinette, is alone sufficient to keep alive the sinking patriotism of our nobles."

"Cavalier Galdino," said Marco, angrily, "there is much truth in what you have said: yet remember, that even truth may be treason; and that, if you always express yourself so freely, there are those not far off who will not permit you to pass without molestation. You are aware how merciless our countrymen are to all favourers of Napoleon. Scarolla is among these mountains with his people——"

"Talk not to me of Scarolla!" cried Belcastro, furiously—"a base-born brigand, to whom this very Carolina sends arms and money: and perhaps she has disgraced the order of St. Constantine by hanging it on his villainous neck, as on that of Francatripa, and Mamone the blood-quaffer. A thousand devils! tell me not of Scarolla—but, fico! never mind politics. Here, Baptistello! clear the table, and bring more wine. What shall it be? Malvasia or Champagne? I have some excellent Muscatelle—its flavour is matchless. Shall it be placed before you?"

"Thank you, with pleasure," said I, bowing, glad to find that our irritable host was discovering a little more of the gentleman in his manner.

"I never drink Muscatelle," said Castelermo. This I knew to be false: it was his favourite wine. "But, Signor Belcastro, I——'

"Have no objection to try yours, you would say? Right, Varro—hand down the old silver jars from the left side of the cabinet there: the lower shelf," he added, throwing a ring with keys towards the servant.

The latter opened the antique piece of furniture, which was composed of ebony, ivory, and silver; the pillars, carving, and figures, being all equally elaborate and beautiful. He brought forth from its dark recesses two flasks, or silver vases, of ample dimensions. Each had a small mouth rising from a tall and taper neck; one was closed by a red, the other by a green crystal stopper. Their workmanship was exquisite, but I doubted if the contents were so. Grapes, bacchanals, and nymphs appeared in rich embossage, and a shield on each side bore a coat of arms deeply engraved. Belcastro's dark eyes flashed, but I thought it was with pride, as he pushed the massive flasks towards us, saying—

"These were made by Cellini, the famous Florentine, for Pope Clement VII., and when Rome was sacked by the Constable de Bourbon, an ancestor of mine,

who served with his vassals under the papal banner, picked them up in the confusion."

Baptistello placed the vases officiously before Castelermo, whispering to us hastily but audibly the ill-omened words—

"*La bella-donna!*"

Marco's cheek flushed, and I started, on observing that Varro's usually swart visage was pale as death.

"The vases are indeed superb," said my companion, turning them round with an air of unconcern; which I had some trouble in imitating, feeling certain that a catastrophe was at hand. "Beautiful, truly, and I doubt not that Clement of holy memory prized them highly, and regretted their loss in an equal degree."

"I have goblets to match, said to be made from part of the treasure stolen by the same cunning sculptor from the castle of St. Angelo. Bring them forth, Baptistello."

The servant, after searching for a time in the depths of the cabinet, declared that the goblets were not there.

"Not there, said you? Satan! they have been stolen; and if so, your bare back shall feel a stripe of the scurlada for every bajoccho they were worth!" cried Belcastro passionately, as he started up and flung open the doors of the cabinet.

"Admirable!" muttered Castelermo, changing the crystal stoppers, and receiving a keen glance from Varro, the moment our host's back was turned. "Be still," he added, grasping my arm energetically, "be patient—our lives are hanging by a hair."

"Saved—buono—O, Gran Dio!" added Varro.

"You must be either blind or drunk, Varro, or have the eyes of a mole, for here are the cups," said the cavaliere, placing three silver-chased tankards on the table. "You may retire now—we need you no more," and our friend retired, but only to the hall-door.

"Shall I fill for you, signori," continued Belcastro, taking out the stoppers and filling our cups from one of the flasks; then, as if inadvertently, he filled his own from the other, and drank it off. The commander of Malta crossed himself: his brow was black as night, but his emotion was unnoticed; he took up his cup, and bowing to the host, drained the bright Muscatelle fearlessly. I had no pretence for delay, and to have lingered would have seemed cowardice to Castelermo. It was a horrid dilemma. My brain reeled, my pulses beat thick and fast, my heart sank, and my whole soul was troubled with sensations such as I had never before experienced—and certainly never have since.

It was a frightful moment of doubt and agony. But I drank off the wine (which, for aught that I knew, was charged with a deadly drug), resolving to run the Cavaliere Galdino through the body, the instant I felt the least symptom of

illness from it.

"Well, signori, I hope you like my favourite wine," said he, as we set down our cups; a dark smile gathering on his sombre features. But Baptistello, too, was smiling; and I gathered comfort from that. The liquor tasted like ordinary Muscatelle: a little sweeter perhaps in flavour. We had soon no doubt, from the grave, grim, and altered aspect of the cavaliere, that he had filled his own goblet with the poisoned wine intended for our destruction (as it had, perhaps, already been for others) and drugged with an infusion of Solarium, or the deadly nightshade; called Bella-donna by the Italians, because ladies make a cosmetic of the juice. I felt that our safety was entirely owing to Castelermo's presence of mind in changing the stoppers, and became deeply grateful to Varro for his tact and friendly warning.

An awkward pause ensued as we set down our cups. It was a grave moment for us all: we felt in our hearts that a terrible crisis was past. But for my friend's peculiar tact and stern example, I would have flung the goblet at Galdino's head on his invitation to drink, and by refusing to taste the Muscatelle have discovered the dark suspicions we entertained. However, we were safe, while this modern Borgia had fallen into his own snare.

"Come, signori, why pause you thus? You seem not to have relished the wine," said our entertainer, again filling his silver cup from the fatal vase, and draining it to the dregs. "Buono! of all our Italian wines, I prefer the Muscatelle; but this, of course, I produce only on certain occasions, and to certain friends," he added, with a hideous laugh, which made the dark corners of the hall echo hollowly. My heart chilled with abhorrence of the man, and apprehension of what was to ensue.

"Croce di Malta!" muttered Marco, surveying him with a glance of stern curiosity; "his potion operates already."

"His death rests with himself—the guilt, I mean: the deed was his own doing," said I, in the same low tone.

Belcastro, lolling back in his chair, laughed and hallooed in a manner so unusual, that a number of his household crowded about the hall door, and were seen peering fearfully upon our dismal carousal. He showed all the symptoms of sudden intoxication: but the disease that was then spreading through every vein took a new and unexpected turn. Bella-donna often produces idiotcy or folly; and Belcastro became quite insane. The white froth of madness hung from his livid lips and black mustachios, and his eyes, while sparkling with all the fury of a tiger's, were glazing fast with the ghastly glare of death. He laughed boisterously: but such laughter! Regarding him more as a wild beast than a man, I thought only of what my fate *might* have been, and loosened my sabre in its sheath, ready to draw it the instant his fit took a dangerous turn. Castelermo

clenched the hilt of his poniard, and the assembled servants shrank behind our chairs for protection.

"Ha, ha! ho, ho! the wine!—'t is like the flames of hell! O Apostoli! the signora of Belcastro—look well about ye, ye vagabonds! She would have been a capitanessa if she could; but I slashed the gay uniform of her beardless capitano! The traitress, Piozzi! poisoned, per Baccho!" and his head settled down on his breast. The white saliva ran from his mouth over his chin and white ruffled shirt; while his eyes, which were fixed on the face of the cavaliere Marco, flashed like those of a fiend rather than a mortal man. From their position, and the slanting manner in which the light fell on them, they seemed absolutely to shoot forth a blue glare from beneath his beetling brows. His visage was pale as death: all, save the scar, which was still of a dark purple hue.

"Villain!" cried he, pointing to it, and starting up in a new frenzy, "have you forgotten that your poniard disfigured me thus? Have you forgotten that night in the Strada di Toledo, at Naples?"

Marco laughed sternly, and the insane man, quailing before his firm glance, again sank down in his seat: for a time he became silent and still.

"Come hither, Baptistello, and you, Signor Claude," said Castelermo; "aid me to disarm him, or he may turn on us, and with some concealed weapon be the death of us all."

We advanced simultaneously towards him; but with a yell so loud and shrill, that (as Varro afterwards protested) it brought forth an echo from each of the twelve figures of Campanini marble, he leaped from his chair, and rushed towards the windows; through which the bright moonlight streamed, as if vying with the illuminated girandoles of the hall. Impelled by madness, or some strange terror, he dashed headlong through the casement, sending the fragments flying in every direction, and sprang out upon the massive stone balcony. There he tossed his arms wildly, while his domestics, overcome with terror, held aloft their crucifixes, and muttered Aves.

"Dog as he is, let us save him, in the name of mercy! Meet him at the other end of the balcony; and stand well on your guard," exclaimed Castelermo, as we stepped out upon the platform. The Cavaliere Galdino was thus placed between us; but the moment he found us advancing deliberately upon him, he placed both hands on the cope of the stone balustrade, and, uttering a shout of triumph, vaulted over and fell headlong through the space below. Far beneath us we heard a slight brushing on the furzy rocks, a falling of dislodged stones, and all was still.

Half sick and giddy, I clung to the balcony, and looked over on the dark pine forest and winding valley below the tower; from which a plumb-line might have been dropped to the depth of two hundred feet without meeting with an

obstacle. He must have been dead before he reached the bottom.

"Devil as he was, and though he has cast a dark shadow on the brightest path that ever opened to me through life, I would rather that he had died at Cassano with his face to the enemy, than thus miserably and ignobly," said Castelermo. "Basta! in making his elegy, I must not forget to thank St. John for our narrow escape, and the author of some ancient story for that blessed hint about changing those coloured stoppers. Ah! the cunning villain. My blood boils while I think of his stern treachery. Approach Baptistello Varro: you shall have a score of bright ducats for this good service to-night," he added, slapping the servant familiarly on the shoulder.

"May my fingers be blistered if I touch them!" said Varro. "Signor, I have only requited the good service you did me on the plains of Apulia, when the Frenchman's plaguy bayonet was at my throat. To any other man than yourself, illustrissimo, I might have behaved like a true sbirro, and allowed him to drink a skinful of la belladonna, if such was the pleasure of his Excellency. 'Tis the third time I have seen these rascally jars produced."

"Then you are the greater rogue, Varro: but as you are deprived of one master, we must find you another. Seek the Cavaliere del Castagno at Crotona, who in my name will enrol you in the Free Corps; where you will do more good service to your country by serving under their colours, than by wearing the livery of these dissipated and tyrannical feudatories, who are a curse to the land they rule."

"Would it please you to see the cavalieressa?" asked Baptistello: "she will be a free woman now, since this last prank of her husband's; and I know a certain capitano who will throw up his cap when he hears of it. A sad life she has endured with him, signor; mewed up in this desolate place, where never a soul was to be seen save a lonely shepherd on the distant mountains, or a stray peasant cutting wood in the valley below. Via! I will quit it this hour, and rather fight under Scarolla than again don the livery and aiguilette of a sbirro."

"Silenca, Varro," said Marco; "silence, and lead on to the apartment of the lady. If it should be so: she whom I loved so much. Basta! I have faced Frenchmen, Turks, and Algerines; but this meeting—forward! It is fitter that she should learn her misfortune, or deliverance, (term it which you may) from the mouth of a gentleman, than from a rabble of serving-men."

We followed Baptistello across the court or quadrangle, and ascending a flight of narrow steps lighted by flickering lamps, arrived at a corridor, where the voices of females and sounds of lamentation became audible.

"This leads to the apartments of the signora," said our guide.

"It seems more like the lighthouse of Messina," I observed, "or the stair to a prison."

”And the poor lady has found it a prison dreary enough,” continued the garrulous Italian. ”Here she has dwelt for three long years, and seen but seldom the face of her husband. Cattivo! often I have heard her lamenting in the dreary nights, when I kept watch in the gallery: for this is a tower of the villa, and its window commands a view as far as to the Tacina. Then I wished that I was a noble cavalier instead of a poor serving-man, that I might free her from such thraldom. You must know, Signor Marco,” and here his voice sank into a very confidential whisper, ”the gay captain who used to serenade the cavalieressa at Venice did not die when the hired bravo stabbed him. The wound was inflicted by a glass poniard, and the blade was broken in the wound; it was long of being extracted, and longer of being healed: but he recovered, and is now at Catanzaro; and, having bribed Scarolla, he has made more than one attempt to carry off his mistress: but, by Excellenza’s orders, we always kept such close watch——”

”Basta, forward!” exclaimed Marco, impatiently. ”Do you take us for brothers of the shoulder-knot, that we are to stand here listening to your household scandal? I must see your lady without delay.”

”To judge by what we hear, her women have been beforehand with you, signor,” replied Varro, again taking the lead; and as a proof how little the cavalier’s treatment of his wife caused her to be respected by his dependants, the sbirro threw open her chamber-door, and without knock or warning ushered us unceremoniously in.

The apartment was elegant: through parted hangings of blue silk and gold, festooned between columns of white marble rising from vases of green jasper, was revealed an inner chamber, where stood a couch formed like a large gilded shell; above it drooped drapery of white satin, edged with the richest lace. Books, music, mandolins, were scattered about, together with work-baskets, flowers, and various gewgaws: everything that taste, wealth, or luxury could wish were there—save happiness. Sadly pale were the careworn but beautiful features of the lady, and strongly they contrasted with the plump, red cheek of her robust Calabrian waiting-woman; who stuck close to her skirts on our entrance.

She started, shook back the heavy ringlets from her snowy brow, and gazed upon us with dark but brilliant eyes, which expressed more astonishment than grief.

”Despina Vignola,” exclaimed Castelermo, as he started back apace, and regarded her with a glance rather of deep sorrow than wonder. ”Ah, Despina! how little could I once have dreamed we should have met here, and greeted each other thus!”

She gazed alternately at the dark but handsome features of the cavaliere and the broad black velvet cross on the breast of his scarlet uniform; and her glance of wonder gradually changed to one of confusion, recognition, and anger:

she covered her blushing features with her pale hand, but for an instant only, and then looking up with an air of hauteur, said—

"This meeting is quite as unexpected to me as it may be to you, Signori Cavalieri. How is it that you have this night slain my dear husband, the Signor Galdino; and within his own house of Belcastro?"

"A cool question!" said Marco, bitterly, gnawing his glove, while his proud spirit was roused by her cold nonchalance; "admirably so! and to be asked by a notary's niece, of a cavaliere of the house of Ruffo Sciglio——"

"Ruffo, the traitor!" said she, scornfully: "but you reply not to my question."

"I will ask but another, Why the devil your amiable sposo slew himself? Basta! he fell into that deadly snare which his deliberate villany and groundless hate prepared for better men. But let me be gentle: perhaps at this moment he is making answer for his misdeeds before that dread tribunal where all men must one day stand—the prince and the peasant, the high-born lord and the homeless lazarone. (Here Marco signed the cross, and all bowed their heads, save myself.) Peace be with his ashes! I shall forget that in the days of my joyous youth he robbed me of my poor patrimony, and deprived me of that which was dearer to me than all the world beside—the love of thee, Despina; forcing me to abandon my country, and serve in the wars of the Maltese knights as a humble musketeer of the galleys. A knight of St. John should bear no enmity to the dead, and wars not with Christian men; unless another's sword is drawn upon him, after which I trust he will stand buffets and blows like a true cavalier of the Rock."

"Bravissimo!" said the lady, affecting to smile scornfully through the tears which glittered in her fine eyes, "a woman's apartment is an excellent place to swagger and bluster in. You have all the manners of a Venetian bravo, signor."

"Those of a Venetian captain might be more pleasing," retorted the excited cavalier. "But I will quit your roof, signora, and travel to Belcastro; though this night Charybdis yawned in my path. Basta! the wearer of such a badge as this cross is scarcely safe in the house of a damsel so famous for her gallantries."

"By the blessed Madonna! Belcastro you shall never see," exclaimed Despina, aroused to passion by his taunts. "Olà, Baptistello! where is the Teniente Guesippe and his sbirri? Here, Signor Guesippe di Gondezani! Dio! I shall burst with fury!"

In a few minutes the teniente, with twelve armed servants at his back, entered the apartment, and surrounded us with levelled musquetoons and fixed bayonets.

"If this adventure ends in blows, I at least shall have one man's life in exchange for my own," said I, drawing my sabre. Castelermo folded his arms beneath the dark military cloak which bore the red cross of his order on the left shoulder, and surveyed the lady and her unscrupulous rabble with a frown of

contempt.

"Molest us, if you dare!" said he. "Bear in remembrance, that though the holy office has passed away, he who raises his hand against a Maltese knight commits sacrilege. Insult me, and think how it will be avenged! There are no less than fifty cavaliers of my old commandery scattered through this very province, and in two days they would hurl this mansion into the valley below. Not less will be the vengeance of the British general, if this officer, my friend, is maltreated by those wretches and malefactors who wear your husband's livery. Back, ye scoundrels!" he suddenly exclaimed, and drew his sword; "and you, Baptistello, lead our horses to the gate. Santa notte, la Signora Cavalieressa! we shall not forget our entertainment in this diabolical lazaretto. And good-night to you, Signor Guesippe, and your myrmidons," continued Marco, with fierce irony. "Basta! the malaria of the valley, and the chance of being riddled by the rifles of Scarolla, are preferable to remaining here, where poison and cold lead seem your best welcome to visitors. And so, once more, a most holy night to all this noble company."

We descended to the piazza, where, mounting our half-refreshed horses, we again set forth on our journey; wishing the Villa Belcastro and all its inmates in a hotter place than Italy.

"Signor Marco, I shall be particularly careful how I thrust myself uninvited upon a Calabrian mansion in future," said I, yawning as we descended the hills.

"You have seen Despina, and this night have had the sequel to my story. How little I expected it, when yesterday I whiled away an hour during our ride by a relation of my adventures. I long suspected that Belcastro was my rival; but never had proof of the fact until to-night."

I addressed him once or twice, but he heard me not, and continued to ride on with his head bent forward, and his bridle-hand resting listlessly on the pommel of the saddle. He was, no doubt, deeply immersed in sad thoughts and recollections, which this unexpected interview with the woman he once loved so tenderly had recalled from oblivion.

END OF VOL. I.

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