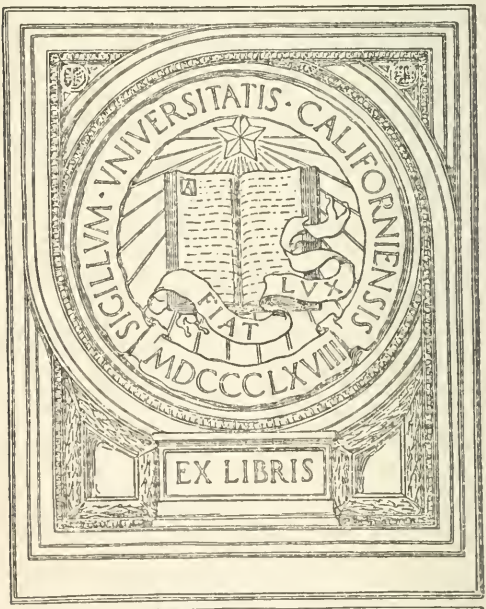

# LA BEATA.

VOLUME II.

# LA BEATA.

BY

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"A DECADE OF ITALIAN WOMEN," "THE GIRLHOOD OF CATHERINE DE MEDICI," "PAUL THE POPE AND PAUL THE FRIAR," ETC., ETC.,

*IN TWO VOLUMES.*

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# LA BEATA.

## CHAPTER XI.

### NEW YEAR'S DAY IN THE VIA DEL CORSO.

THE year in which the events that have been narrated took place was a marked one in Florence—marked by a great calamity, the immediate results of which were felt for several years, and the recollection of which, notwithstanding all the world-famous changes and revolutions which have since that time stirred up from its foundations all the social system of the country, is yet fresh in the minds of the Florentines. It was the year of the great flood—of the last of the great

floods that have befallen Florence, that is to say, for there have been many such in the course of its history.

It is curious that Florence, in the middle of the nineteenth century, should suffer from the overbearing injustice and wrong done by Imperial Rome to the obscure provincial municipium on the banks of the Arno some two thousand years ago. But such is, in fact, the case. In the singularly situated low-lying valley of the Chiana, a basin receiving the drainage of a large tract of country between the Arno and the Tiber, there is a watershed of such trifling elevation that it was easy, by an artificial modification of it, to direct the waters from the latter and towards the former of these rivers. Now the Romans, as we remember, had seen "yellow Tiber, with its waters furiously dashed from the Tuscan bank, rushing to overthrow the mnouments of the king, and the temple of Vesta." And in their anxiety to avoid a

repetition of such sights, little caring what monuments and temples might be thrown down in distant subject provinces, they constructed earthworks, which threw the waters of the Chiana entirely into the already overcharged Arno. The result was very soon seen in disastrous floods in all the lower Valdarno; and records exist from a very early period of petitions and remonstrances from the inhabitants to the masters of the world on the subject. But mortal masters of worlds are little apt to listen to such complaints from subject peoples, and the valley of the Arno and its city have been liable to destructive floods from that time to this.*

The autumn had been remarkably fine in the year alluded to, and very little rain had fallen. The "city of flowers" was, at the beginning of November, full to overflowing

* After the flood referred to in the text, works were executed, which, it is hoped, will prevent the recurrence of similar disasters.

with visitors, and there was every promise of a brisk and prosperous season. Suddenly a heavy and unusually continuous fall of rain for some fifty or sixty hours sufficed to change the prospect very completely. A little before twelve o'clock one night, the guards appointed to watch the river in time of flood warned the inmates of the jewellers' shops situated on the old bridge to remove in all haste their stocks and themselves into places of greater safety. A few hours later the river had overflowed the Lungarno on both sides, as the streets are called, which run along the terraced banks of the Arno, and was raging and tumbling tempestuously in one broad turbid yellow torrent, reaching from house to house. The brave old bridge stood firm, but for many hours it was thought to be in imminent danger, and another two feet of rise in the waters would assuredly have swept it away. The inhabitants of all the low-lying part of the town woke the next

morning to find the streets before their doors turned into eddying torrents—those, at least, whose homes on upper floors placed them out of reach of the water—for the dwellers in ground-floors, the shopkeepers, and the poorer classes living in smaller tenements, the first floors of which were not high enough or solid enough to be safe, had been all night busy in removing such of their property as could be moved in the time out of the reach of the water. In a great many streets there was no quitting the houses, at least by the doors of them, that morning. And in many instances those who left home early in the morning, anxious to see the state of the city, as was the case with the present writer, found it impossible a few hours later to return.

During all that terrible day the raging river continued to whirl along before the eyes of the helplessly gazing citizens all sorts of trophies of its destructive triumphs in the upper part of its course. Broken bridges,

bodies of animals, domestic furniture, the wreck of farm-yards, were dashed by in mad confusion—the usual work of insurgent waters! But one incident there was which is worth recording. A sleeping infant floating in its cradle came down safely riding the mud-coloured heaving torrent, and by means of a line thrown over it was drawn unhurt to the shore.

Within the city there was very little, if any, loss of life, but the destruction of property was enormous. The worst part of the evil, however, remained after the waters had subsided, in the mischief done to the dwellings of the poorer classes. The waters came down heavily charged with the friable yellow soil of the upper valley of the Arno, and the hills which enclose it. This they deposited in every street and in every house they entered in masses often three or four feet in thickness. And it is easy to imagine the unhealthy state in which such a visitation

must have left the dwellings of those who had no choice but to return to them as soon as the water was out of them. Rarely, save in its mediæval days of pestilence, has Florence known so unhealthy a season as that which followed the great flood.

The *Via del Corso* just escaped the visitation. The waters rose to within a few inches of the level at which it also would have been flooded. But the effects of the malaria generated by whole streets of dwellings saturated with damp, and for many weeks half filled with steaming mud, did not confine themselves within the limits actually reached by the water. The evil influence was felt throughout the lower and more densely inhabited parts of the city, and the seeds of permanent disease were implanted in the constitutions of those who had not sufficient energy of vital force to resist them.

For such persons as were well circumstanced, or whose houses had been far re-

moved from the waters, the great flood became in a few days a topic for idle conversation. The waters retired within their boundaries. The streets, at least, if not the houses of the poor, were cleared of mud. The foreign visitors subscribed generously for the relief of the sufferers. The priests struggled hard, and for the most part successfully, to prevent any aid from reaching them save through their own hands. The heretics refused to pay their contributions to utterly irresponsible and unaccountable priests. The poor people were told by them that the wealthy English strangers refused to do anything to alleviate the general distress. And a great deal of acrimonious talk, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, was got out of the occasion—all as usual in such cases.

During the long, long day succeeding that on which La Beata had returned to her earliest home in the Corso, Pippo had not

been near the place. Gradually as the dull hours wore on, the sickness of the heart, which comes of hope deferred, assailed her with ever-increasing intensity. She had not admitted the possibility of a doubt that he would come during the day. When the morning had passed, she told herself that of course he would take a good spell of work at his easel before leaving the studio. When the afternoon was far spent, she reflected that naturally the best economy of time would lead him to choose the twilight hour for his visit. Probably he would spend the evening there. That would be far better than a visit during the day. Then as the dusk grew into darkness she could not refrain from running backward and forward to the window, and at each fruitless examination of the darkening street the misery of hope slowly, yet all too rapidly, changing to despair, settled its cold weight more heavily upon her heart.

The next day he came. But his visit was, as might have been easily predicted, worse than none at all. La Beata would not have admitted to herself that it was so, though every word had inflicted a separate stab, and every incident of it had furnished material for subsequent painful rumination and misgiving. He had come in about eleven o'clock in the morning brisk, and to all appearance in high good humour, but evidently in a great hurry.

"Well, Tina, how goes it?" he cried, as he bustled into the room, while she bounded forward, and would have thrown herself into his arms, had he not prevented her by seizing her hand and shaking it in a frank old-friend sort of style, which said as plain as words could have said it, "Understand that this is the sort of footing we are to be on together for the future!"

"You are better, eh!" he continued; "Did not I tell you so? I am hurried out

of my life;—the new studio to look after;—things to be moved, and a hundred other matters to think of. Patringham wants me to get on with his other copy;—brought another *milordo Inglese* this morning. There will be something to be done there, too! Oh! the game's alive, never fear! But I must be off! Per Bacco! it is later than I thought. You see how I am driven. Good-bye, Tina! Get quite well! *A rivederla*, Signora Sappi!"

And so he bustled out, having scarcely permitted poor Tina to utter a word, and leaving her out of breath with scared surprise and nervous excitement. Then came the reaction; and rushing into the little closet that was now as in old times her chamber, she threw herself on her bed in an agony of tears.

The widow Sappi saw that the stale old drama which has had so tremendously long a run, and will continue to be performed daily, nightly, and hourly, till further notice

(of a very fundamental kind) shall be given, was proceeding quite according to customary rule.

"Poveretta!" said she to herself, pityingly, "she don't come to see the truth so quick as some do. But it's no use saying anything. Oh me! I wonder where the saint is, or the dozen of saints for that matter, that could get a poor loving girl to believe them, if they told her o' Monday what she'll have to find out and break her heart over o' Tuesday. Not if the blessed Virgin was to come down herself to speak to her!"

As the winter went on, the widow Sappi often wondered how much neglect it would take to open La Beata's eyes to the too evident truth, that all Pippo's feeling with regard to her was summed up in an anxious desire to forget and obliterate every trace of all that had ever passed between them. The experienced widow's observation in such matters had not fallen on a case of such

determined hoping against hope, such wilfully blind fidelity, and such unshakeable faith in the creed of its idol-worship. But gradually, as if according to a designedly calculated scale, Pippo's visits became rarer and rarer. Each interval was sure to be longer than the last. Shorter or more unsatisfactory these visits could hardly be than they were from the first. And La Beata, in her long hours of striving to shut her eyes to the truth that was slowly forcing itself upon her, was more than once startled into a momentary conviction that all was indeed over for her, by the thought of her entire ignorance of his affairs and movements. She did not even know where his new studio was. He had always evaded any direct answer to any questions of hers on this point. It was easy for him to do so in those short hurried visits; for the slightest rebuff sufficed to turn aside her timid questionings. But she could not fail to be struck by the fact that he communicated

to her nothing of his interests, fortunes, hopes, fears, or plans. A general joyousness of tone, and vague expressions of exultation, gave her to understand that things were going prosperously with him; but beyond this she knew nothing. And the immense change in their relationship which such a fact implied,—the ever increasing distance, which seemed to grow of itself and force them farther and farther asunder,—were more efficacious perhaps in killing the last obstinately renascent shoots of hope, than even the negative evidence of his neglect.

There are happily and vigorously constituted organizations which refuse to submit to the weight of permanent sorrow, which *turn off* misery as an oiled surface turns off water, and which grow towards consolation and fresh hopes and joys by a law as sure in its operation as that which bids a plant turn towards the sun. It is a mistake to suppose that such idiosyncrasies are necessarily incapable

of strong affections and warm sympathies; still more so to hold that such must needs be shallow and sterile natures. The probabilities are in favour of a diametrically contrary conclusion. Such organizations can feel deeply, and can feel permanently, where feeling can see a possibility of finding issue for itself in hopeful action. But they instinctively reject hopeless suffering. These are fortunate, strong, wise, amiable, useful, eupeptic individuals, whose fathers and forefathers, for many a generation perhaps, led physically and morally healthy lives. The sunny paths of the world are theirs *de jure*, as well as *de facto;* and it is a shallow, unappreciative, and morbid philosophy which would reproach them for walking in them.

But these fortunate strong ones are too apt on their side to do very imperfect justice, and show but scanty sympathy to those less well-balanced natures, in which happiness seems an exotic to be kept alive only during

a constant combination of favourable circumstances, and sorrow the indigenous weed, whose roots, always alive in the soil, spring up into florid growth at every opportunity. The sleek and dappled herd full of the pasture will turn their wanton horns against the stricken deer. In this case also a larger sympathy would lead to a more correct appreciation. And it would be seen that many an accusation of false and affected sentimentality is unjust, and many an exhortation to "make an effort,"—the effort in question being nothing more nor less than an attempt to add by taking thought a cubit to the moral stature,—ill-placed and useless.

Natures of exquisite delicacy and infinite loveliness are to be found among these fragile ones whose minds seem more readily attuned to sorrow than to joy. The crowning virtue of self-sacrifice grows readily in a heart schooled to expect little for its own gratification; and the devotion of passionate love

finds a congenial soil in the soul which needs the support of another, and feels that its small share of sunshine can only reach it by reflection from a more self-sustained nature.

Our poor little fragile, clinging, pale Tina —no longer La Beata, for her phase of artist life, and her connection with the world which had so nicknamed her were over for ever—was essentially and to an exceptional degree one of these;—a class of minds by no means to be confounded with that other equally un-self-supporting but far more shallow and less to be tolerated category, which is always craving for promiscuous sympathy, loves to "wipe its eyes on the public," finds a morbid satisfaction in baring its woes to the gaze of others, and consolation in talking of its sorrows. It is the privilege, and at the same time in a great degree the misfortune of such natures as that of poor Tina that they are self-contained though not self-supporting. It would have

been better for her if she could have spoken of the grief that was sapping her life to the kindly sympathizing, though imperfectly and unintelligently sympathizing widow Sappi. But she could not do this. It was impossible to her to speak, when speech could only have been blaspheming against the idol still enthroned in her heart. Discourse could only have tended to disclose and bring into stronger light the fact that her intelligence and her heart were in contradiction to each other. And as the heart was so strong and the intelligence so weak that the former was supreme tyrant of the will, she shrank from aught that could be suspected of a tendency to take part with the latter.

Her love for the master of her heart was indefeasible. The affection she had given she had no power or will to withdraw. The object of it might become changed, but her devotion could know no change. He might become, or be discovered to be unworthy of

being loved. It was a misfortune,—the greatest of all conceivable misfortunes,—a misfortune that might kill her life, but could not kill her love. There stood extant to the external senses the form and the individuality, which her imagination had invested with all the attributes that can most deserve a woman's devotion. And the higher faculties of her nature were not sufficiently developed to be capable of undoing that work, and separating the ignoble real of the individual from the noble ideal of her own creation.

Such often is the love of women, and such sometimes, but far more rarely, the love of men. And poets and romancers have vied with each other in throwing a halo of glory and poetry around the unalterable constancy of a love thus indefeasible. And there is something in love itself so lovely,—the manifestation of its power in its intensest form appeals so irresistibly to human sympathy,—that men, and still more women,

have been prone to accept such presentments as true delineations of a lofty and admirable beau-ideal.

Yet surely there must be grave and dangerous error in any such estimate. Surely a manifestation of human passion which has furnished forth the subject-matter of more written and acted tragedies than all the other workings of the heart of man put together, and which by the necessity of the case can issue only in the saddest of all tragedies, cannot be admirable; cannot be in accordance with the highest law of our nature; cannot be accepted as a permanent and necessary result of the divinely ordained constitution of man and his destinies. Qualities, dispositions, conduct, passions, which necessarily involve woe and suffering, are surely by that fact alone convicted of inconsistence with that higher and better development of human destinies, to which an improved intelligence of good and evil is

conducting mankind. The unalterable love which loves on despite all things is beautiful, but it is not the most beautiful. The love which does not cease when its object ceases to be or to appear deserving of love, partakes more of the lower nature of passion than of the spirituality of such a union as should make the blessedness of two eternal souls throughout eternity.

All the faculties, all the capabilities, all the passions of our nature are intended and calculated to lead to joy and happiness only, as surely as the fire which can consume, the subtle poison which can sap the life-springs, and the lightning which can blast, duly subjected to man's control, may and do minister to his comfort and advantage. And the preaching addressed to those whose minds are more readily reached by the poet and the novelist than by other preachers, should tell them that all the tragedies and sorrows which love may lead to, are due wholly and

solely to love misplaced. They may be told, too, that for the well-placing of it, the requirements of every portion of our complex nature must be duly complied with; that instincts, appetites, and passions are as wisely ordered to equally necessary and benevolent ends, as the more spiritual aspirations of the soul; that neither can be neglected with impunity; that the eye, the fancy, the instinctive preferences, the judgment, the conscience, must all be duly consulted, and all satisfied; that a love so based *aright*, is a love for time and for eternity; and that a love so based *in error* may have to endure unceasing the pains and penalties of error, but that it will cease, as soon as the error is discovered, and will not leave hopeless heart-wreck and a blasted life behind it.

Our poor little Tina's love, true-hearted, devoted, self-sacrificing, beautiful, piteous as it was, was of a different quality from this. No conductor had been provided for the

lightning, and it passed through her life, and left it a blasted wreck. What would you have? Can the results of strength, knowledge, and culture be expected from weakness, ignorance, and neglect? And where are we to look for the author of the mischief? Who was to blame in the matter? Healthy Anglo-Saxon speculation, knowing nothing of "disgrazie," never sees misery and evil, without asking who is to be blamed for it. But the search for the maker of such mischief is apt to lead the inquirer very far afield sometimes. The genesis of cause and effect in the moral world is a large and terrible subject. And what analysis can hope to discover all the agencies that have contributed to produce any given phenomenon of character or conduct! Possibly, however, if one were required to put one's finger on the human being who to the best of mortal ken was most responsible for the shortcomings, imperfection, and weakness of poor Tina,

one would point perhaps to Lorenzo the Magnificent, or haply to Pope Clement the Seventh. But Lorenzo and Clement had moral ancestors as well as Tina. And maybe it were as well to limit our investigations to the results of conduct, without touching on the point of blame and moral responsibility.

Tina judged no one, blamed no one for the hopeless misery that had fallen on her, —not even herself. Moral speculation was as impossible to her intellect as anger or resentment to her heart. She knew only that all light and hope were gone out from her life. Very slowly as the weeks rolled heavily on, had she learned to admit the idea that she was no longer loved. Hope had died very hard with her. The iron had entered into her soul by a slow process of graving, more prolific of anguish than a thousand deaths by sudden stab.

As the year came to its close, the flicker-

ing waning lamp of her hope was going out also. Each one of the rare, hurried visits Pippo had paid her during the weeks that had succeeded her residence with the widow Sappi had been marked by some word dropped carelessly by him in appearance, but in reality carefully calculated to indicate the total and necessary divergence of their lives thenceforward. Since the middle of December, she had not seen him at all.

So the old year died, having done its appointed work, by forwarding the world one little stage on its invisible-goaled *excelsior* progress, despite broken vows and breaking hearts. And the young one started on its course amid festivity and rejoicing, and the grandest resolutions of far surpassing its predecessor in the portion of that unending journey to be accomplished within its span, and the more valuable certainty of at least inevitably achieving its own ordained task in the matter despite the still re-germinating

weed-crop of sorrows, and the fresh hearts to be stifled by them.

It was the evening of the first day of the new year; and all Florence was intensely busy in cramming into one night more festival-keeping, more friendly meetings, more amusement, and more feasting than could be contained in any four-and-twenty hours. The whole city was keeping the universal holiday.

All Florence! The whole city! So the stereotyped phrase goes. The imagination accepts it, and does not care to take note of exceptions, mere spots on the sun of the general picture. "De minimis non curat lex." At such times the stricken deer of the herd hide themselves more solicitously than ever.

A holiday is a very heavy day to joyless hearts. Religion and custom forbad the widow Sappi and her assistant to occupy the hours with their accustomed labour. The materials of their craft had all been carefully gathered and put away. The poor, fireless,

brick-floored room was swept and garnished; a fresh supply of oil was poured into the little lamp that hung in front of the old black picture of the Madonna; Tina had knelt in the solitude of her closet before the cherished coloured print of the "Virgin of the Seven Sorrows," which had accompanied her in her migration to Pippo's home, and had been brought back to its old place on her return; she had poured forth all her simple tale of sorrows, and passionate craving, with streaming eyes upraised to the serenely sad face of the picture, and the symbolical poniards planted in her maternal bosom; she had striven, as best she knew, to throw open her soul to the influences and mercies of the Infinite; and the recording angel surely dropped one of those tears which need be so continually streaming from his eyes, on the word *Idolatry*, as he noted the fact upon the record.

Then the two women attended mass in

the little neighbouring church, which Tina used to frequent in the old dull and monotonous but comparatively happy days with her mother. The mass, however, did not last very long; and when they returned from it to their dreary room the holiday which "all Florence" was enjoying began to weigh upon them very severely. The regular course for the disposal of the afternoon, according to the fashion of their class, would have been to array themselves in the neat and becoming toilette which most Florentine women manage to possess, even if the acquisition of it cost them the half of their daily pittance of dry bread during many a month of saving, and then to have sallied forth to meet acquaintances in the course of a walk on the *Lungarno*. Or, as often occurs in cases where poverty is so great as to have rendered the acquisition of the garments indispensable for a becoming appearance in the streets absolutely incompatible with the

necessity, scarcely recognized as more important, of keeping body and soul together, they might have arranged their hair with all the care and skill of a professional artist, limited their toilette ambition to rendering themselves presentable down to the waist only, and thus have sat at the open window, exposing to public gaze only as much of them as was fit to meet the eye, and contenting themselves with such modicum of chat as could be enjoyed with neighbours and acquaintances in the street, prevented by the friendly window parapet from seeing that the "mulier formosa superne" ended in a ragged or dirty wrapper.

But neither the widow nor her boarder were in a condition to enjoy even this mildest form of dissipation and holiday-making. The malaria produced by the results of the flood had penetrated to the poor widow's joints and muscles, and produced rheumatism, which had caused her much suffering

for several days past. And Tina on returning from mass was attacked by violent shivering fits, and felt so unwell that she proposed to profit by the holiday to go to her bed. Partly for company's sake, and partly for kindness' sake, the widow, with the thin blanket from her own bed thrown over her shoulders and a *scaldino** under her feet, established herself by her guest's bed-side; and so these two kept their holiday-tide of welcome to the beginning year.

At last the weary day wore to its early close; and "at the twenty-four"† the

* A "scaldino," or "warmer" is a little earthenware pot with a small quantity of ignited braise in it, almost universally carried about with them by both men and women of the lower and middle classes of the Florentines in cold weather.

† "The twenty-four" is the common Florentine phrase for the hour of sunset. The hour preceding it is similarly sometimes called "the twenty-three;" but these two phrases are the only remnants still surviving of the old method of counting the first hour after sundown as one o'clock, and so on to twenty-four.

churches rang out the Ave-Maria. They had been sitting in silence for some time past as the shadows deepened around them. Tina heaved a great sigh as the evening call to prayer was rung. She recited devoutly the Latin words of the formula prescribed, in a whispered tone; and then said, "I had been thinking, Marta, for the last ten days, that he might perhaps come on this day, when everybody sees their . . . . all those they love. But the day is over! . . . . Everything is over!" she added, after a moment's pause; and then again while the good widow was meditating how best to take advantage of the moment to fix in her mind the truth that such was indeed the case, she said, "Should you hear the bell at the door, Marta, sitting here in this room?"

"Sure, I should hear it, my child, and so would you, if any hand were there to pull it. But bless your dear heart, he you are thinking of will never pull that bell again."

Tina made no answer, but turned her poor thin face to the pillow, and her tears flowed fast and silently.

"But, Marta," she said again suddenly, after a while, "suppose he were ill—too ill to come out or write!"

"Poor little thing!" answered La Sappi, sadly, "it is very hard to think that all is over, even when one says it. But what would you have? The world is made so! Men don't love like we do. I knew, when he first came here, how it would be. My good man went to sea and never came back any more. He was drowned. And you must think likeways of him that is gone from you."

The widow meant her words to be words of consolation. But the practice of that moral surgery requires gifts and knowledge, which are not at the command of every one. No sorrowing heart was ever comforted by arguments, however lucid, proving that it

ought not to feel as it does feel, and drawn from the experience of one feeling differently. Sympathy, not dyspathy, is the only comforter. The beneficent action of one human soul on another may be truly infinite; but for the exercise of such influence it is absolutely necessary that the one soul should be able to come into contact with the other. To dispute the grounds of a sorrow, instead of sharing it, is to raise a barrier between the heart you would comfort and your own, instead of finding a point of contact.

Kindly Marta Sappi's efforts failed, accordingly, to afford any consolation. Tina turned her face again wearily to the pillow; and another silence ensued. After a while she said, "I wish I was quite sure, Marta, that it was for Pippo's good that he should leave me. But I know so little! Do you think that it is likely to be best for him?"

"Well, I suppose if he comes to be a famous painter, as they say, he will be wanting

to marry some one who has got money and friends that would be likely to help him, you know," responded the widow, like an experienced and judicious widow as she was.

"And I have neither money nor friends to give him," said Tina, musingly, "that is certain. But it has often seemed to me," she added, after a pause, "that money and friends are not the best of all things to have."

She had not the slightest idea, poor child, that she was plagiarizing from doctors and teachers from Solomon downwards—still less that she was propounding a great moral truth. She was giving with all diffidence the result of her own unaided meditations on her own sorrows.

"All the money and friends in the world," she pursued, "are nothing at all to me in comparison to being loved by him. Why should they be so much more valuable to him than all the love I gave him?"

The problem was propounded with the most perfect simplicity and good faith, *as* a problem to be solved, if the widow Sappi had the wit to solve it.

"I suppose," said she, after a little consideration, "that these gentlemen have more need of money than we have; and then besides . . . . . ." But on second thoughts the widow deemed it better to suppress the further elucidations of the subject which were in her mind. She considered discreetly that the "strong meat" of bitter worldly wisdom, which her experience had enabled her to collect on this question, might not be adapted to the use of the babe before her, at all events in her present state of mind.

"If I could only be satisfied that Pippo was really better off," resumed Tina, after another long pause, "and if I could but die, *Marta mia*, out of this weary, weary world, I would be content."

"Nay! you are far too young to talk in

that way for many a year yet!" rejoined the widow, taking a view of the matter which she meant to be encouraging, but apparently admitting that one who had been in the world half a century might naturally enough be willing to leave it. But perceiving that Tina laid back her head upon the pillow, as she said those last words—that she closed her eyes, and composed her hands and slender figure, as if she were trying to realize to her imagination the perfect repose of the last sleep, the good woman rose from her seat, and after looking down on the pale, worn face for a minute or two, sadly shaking her head, turned and stole quietly to her own bed, in the hope that the stricken heart might obtain the blessing of at least a temporary oblivion.

And so the holiday of New Year's Day was passed by those two women in their solitary home in the Corso, while "all Florence" was in the streets, and the theatres

and the ball-rooms welcoming the new year and the first night of Carnival, with singing, laughing, and dancing; and every now and then the sound of noisy revellers in the street, beneath Tina's windows, swept in fitful gusts over her feverishly sensitive ear, like far-away echoes of a distant world, with which she seemed to have no longer any connection or relationship.

## CHAPTER XII.

### PATRONAGE.

Pippo meanwhile had been dexterously making the most of that tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on, as we know, to fortune. As his visits to the house in the Corso had gradually slackened and at length finally ceased, they became constantly more numerous to the *cereria* in a street a few yards to the north of it. No word had ever passed between him and the old wax-chandler with reference to his objectionable connection with Nunziatina Leti; but the old man was as perfectly well informed of his separation from her as if every step in the matter had been taken under his

own direction. It would have been very difficult for any man, woman, or child in Florence to conceal their comings in or goings out from Laudadio Benincasa, if he had any interest in making himself acquainted with them. If the Romish modern successors of the apostles do not precisely carry out the recommendation to "have *all* things in common," they at least conform to the apostolic rule in the matter of useful information respecting the members of their flocks; and old Laudadio's relations and friendships placed all this joint-stock fund of information at his disposition at need.

The membership of the "Venerable Archconfraternity of the Misericordia" had also been duly effected; and Pippo, the respectable and "right-thinking," though perfectly irrecognizable under the disguise of his black frock and hood when engaged in any of the acts of mercy peculiar to the brotherhood,

yet let his right hand know what his left was doing quite sufficiently to obtain all the credit and consideration due to so respectable a position.

The desirable results, indeed, of such a character as the young artist was now acquiring for himself in a society constituted as that of Florence then was, were apt to meet the fortunate "right-thinker" at every turn in the most unexpected manner. Mr. Patringham had wished Pippo to make for him a sketch of a picture in the Pitti palace, which it was generally very difficult to obtain permission to copy in consequence of the great number of applications for the favour. At the gallery of the Uffizi, indeed, favour had nothing to do with the matter: copyists put their names down on a list for such and such pictures, and waited a greater or less number of years till their turn came. But in the more aristocratic saloons of the Pitti, though the collection of pictures is equally

national property, a judicious word discreetly whispered by certain lips into certain ears rarely failed to obtain the desired privilege for applicants of the "right-thinking" class. And Pippo thus found himself able to undertake at once for Mr. Patringham a commission which the majority of his competitors would not have been able to execute. Such are the rewards of respectability.

Mr. Patringham rarely failed, every time he had occasion to speak with Pippo, to ask kindly after his wife's health, to the great annoyance of that thoroughly reformed character. He always replied to these unwelcome inquiries by a melancholy shake of the head and a few words intended to give the Englishman to understand that there was little hope of her recovery, and that the less that was said on so painful a subject the better.

Old Laudadio, who was, as has been seen, better informed, was also more discreet. No

unpleasant reference to a past state of things ever marred the pleasant visits to the sanctum behind the *cereria.* But there were others who could not be kept in ignorance of the real facts of the case, as was Mr. Patringham, and who were not gifted with the judicious discretion of Signor Benincasa. There was our old acquaintance Tito Fanetti, for instance, and many others of the artist guild, whose lax morality had in no wise been scandalized by the irregular nature of Pippo's alliance with La Beata, but who were not at all disposed to look with tolerance on the desertion of her. Upon one occasion, when Tito had remonstrated with his friend on the subject, Pippo had attempted to point out to him the true orthodox view of the subject, and to show him how clearly it was his bounden duty to put an end to the sin and scandal of which he repented having been guilty. But his endeavours in this line called forth so strong

an expression of that same ribald contempt for ecclesiastical doctrines and sanctions, of which it may be remembered Tito was guilty on a former occasion, that Pippo felt that it would be a casting of pearls before swine to speak again to him or such as he on the subject. In fact, the fraternity of artists at Florence were far from being a "right-thinking" class as a body, and were accordingly by no means regarded favourably in the high places of either church or state. Pippo's new profession of faith, therefore, and new friendships and associations, were considered by his former companions as indicating a desertion to the Philistines and an apostacy, which placed a social gulf between him and them. All this, however, was but a recommendation the more to the favourable consideration of the social camp he had resolved on joining. It served to mark him more unmistakably as one of their own, and to justify the selection of him as

the recipient of favours reserved for warranted sound "right-thinkers."

But one of the consequences of the ill favour in the eyes of his old comrades, which Pippo's recent conduct and habits had incurred, was to make his accustomed evening haunts at the cafés frequented by them disagreeable to him. And the natural result was that his visits to the *cereria* became more and more frequent. There he was always received with smiles of welcome and dismissed with invitations to return; and the unfailing cordiality of both the father and daughter convinced him that the great prize of Beppina's hand was assuredly within his reach.

A small alteration in the old wax-chandler's household, too, which took place soon after the commencement of Carnival, seemed to him, in all probability rightly, to have been made with the express view of facilitating his visits. A sister of Signor Laudadio, the

wife of a rich *fattore** in the Casentino,† came to pass the Carnival at Florence in her brother's house. By this arrangement the old trader was dispensed from any necessity of breaking his usual habits for the sake of receiving his young protégé. The Signora Assunta Marradi made an unexceptionable chaperon for her niece; and the two ladies were always sure to be found at home in the large sitting-room looking into the garden behind the shop.

La Signora Assunta was some years older than her brother Laudadio, but was full as many his junior in health and vigour. The brisk, active little old woman was as ruddy as he was yellow; equally ignorant and

* Agent. The managers of the estates of the larger Tuscan proprietors, who very frequently may be observed to become rich as the ignorant city-living landlord gets poorer, are so called. The position of these men is more that of an Irish estate agent than of an English bailiff.

† The name of the upper valley of the Arno.

uneducated; but supplying the narrow world-wisdom which he had picked up in the course of his city life by a fair share of that somewhat more genial, rustic shrewdness, not altogether unseasoned by a dash of humour, which is so frequently found among the Tuscan rural population. A stranger to the varieties of Tuscan life and manner would have been puzzled to guess the social position and standing of La Signora Assunta Marradi. The confusion in her costume of the very evident tokens of something more than easy circumstances with the forms of dress of a peasant; and still more the mixture in her manner of humble deference when speaking to those whom she considered as city-nurtured gentlemen, with the short, sharp air of one used to authority which she adopted towards inferiors, would have thrown him out. Her dress, on a visit to the capital, for instance, would have consisted of a black silk gown of the richest quality, with

a small scarlet handkerchief pinned across her bosom, a huge necklace of six strings of pearls, and a broad-leafed, low-crowned, black felt hat, if Beppina had not by dint of earnest entreaty induced her in some degree to modify it. At home in the Casentino she could never have been caught out of her bed without this last article of costume; and very rarely without a distaff charged with flax attached to her waist, which her fingers were ceaselessly spinning into thread to be made into linen sheets and table-cloths, destined to increase the store, already sufficient for many generations of her descendants, laid up in the walnut-wood chests and presses, which were the palladium of her household. In Florence, Beppina had with some difficulty succeeded in substituting for the time-honoured distaff the genteeler industry of the knitting-needle.

Now and then Signor Marradi himself, who with his broad ruddy face, and broader

shoulders, his stout calves cased in stout woollen hose, his broad-leafed hat, and his huge metal-buttoned scarlet waistcoat, and knee-breeches, might have passed for an English farmer of the old school, had he not worn little gold rings in his ears, would come up to Florence for a day to visit his brother-in-law, bringing with him a present of game, or a ham fed on the acorns of the Casentino woods. Upon such occasions Pippo's evening visit was changed into an invitation to dinner, and the party would be completed by some one of Signor Laudadio's many reverend friends.

Beppina's sole talent and accomplishment was singing, together with a sufficient knowledge of the piano to enable her to accompany herself very tolerably in the popular songs and "stornelli," with which every Tuscan girl's memory is stocked, and very intolerably in the grand operatic pieces, which she preferred to attempt. And this gift of La Bep-

pina did a twofold service during those evening visits of Pippo's, which from being frequent at the beginning of Carnival had become almost nightly towards its close. Not only was her singing agreeable enough, when confined to the popular music, which the genius of Gordigiani has made familiar to all Europe, as her aunt insisted it should be, when she was to hear it; but it stood in the place of talking, which was a truly inappreciable advantage to two persons in the position of herself and Signor Pippo, who had as nearly as possible nothing to say to each other. Beppina felt a very genuine admiration for Pippo's fine eyes, well-formed person, and handsome black beard; but it would not have been proper to state as much even once; and far less was it possible to fill the long hours with perpetual repetitions of the ingenuous protestation of Lord Bateman's fair Sophia, "I wish 'gnor Pippo as you vas mine," even though that unsophisticated

child of Nature did repeat the formula with "every health she drank unto him." Beppina said as much very intelligibly with her pretty black eyes, "every song she sang unto him," but she could not do more. Pippo, on the other hand, was most seriously intent on making himself master of the accumulated profits of the *cereria* by marrying the heiress thereof. But neither could these sentiments be openly declared. So the songs supplied everything that was wanting to their intercourse. Not only was it easy by due interchange of glances to appropriate to themselves the sentiments expressed; but the performance afforded a ground for at least some little intervening small talk, in which Pippo could without too painful an effort of imagination and invention find something suggested by the words that could be turned into an insinuation of his devoted affection and eager hopes.

Then, a little later, when Carnival was

over, they were much assisted by a peculiar Tuscan lenten institution, which seems to have been invented expressly for such purposes. This is the merry game of "verde," which, according to ancient custom, is played in this wise. At the beginning of Lent a gentleman offers a lady a sprig of box, inviting her to divide it with him. If she consents to do so, the act of breaking it engages her to a game of "verde," with the proposer, to last during the forty days of Lent. By the rule of the game each party is bound to have about them, and to produce on every demand of their partner in the play, a sprig of box, green and in good condition. Failure to do so subjects them either to the forfeiture of some previously determined gage, or to the payment of whatever forfeit the winning party may demand in the exercise of his or her discretion. And this latter more tremendous mode of playing the game is generally preferred, as may be easily imagined, by

most of those, who have still their all to lose or to win. Of course the gist of the fun is to demand the production of the green sprig, the "verde," at the most unlikely and unexpected times and occasions possible; and every conceivable stratagem for traitorously depriving the adversary of his or her talisman, such as pocket picking and corruption of valets and abigails, is all fair. All this too, as may likewise be readily understood, is admirably adapted to forward the objects of aspiring youths and smitten damsels;—some of whom would seem to consider the real interest of the game to consist in never being found provided with their "verde;" while few perhaps are sufficiently cruel or cautious to reach Easter without having to pay forfeit in some shape or other.

So, Beppina and Pippo played at "verde" together;—on very unequal terms, as Pippo declared; inasmuch as there was plenty of box in the garden behind the *cereria* close to

the sitting-room windows, and thus always at hand not only to supply her with daily fresh sprigs, but also to suggest the necessity of arming herself with them. Yet it generally happened, that on leaving the house to attend mass, Beppina's mind was, as at such a time was but right and proper, so much occupied by other thoughts, that she totally forgot all about her "verde." Pippo, of course, understood his part too well to fail either in being duly seen at mass in the first place, or in being ready at the church door to touch the tips of Beppina's fingers with holy water as she went out in the next place, or in asking for her "verde," as he did so, and receiving with due triumph her tittering confession of having forgotten all about such nonsense in the third place, or lastly in exacting the forfeit he judged it most expedient to impose the same evening, while Aunt Assunta sat by and saw fair play.

Meantime, while Pippo's easy wooing was

progressing thus satisfactorily, old Laudadio had not forgotten his project respecting the picture of Saint Filomena, nor neglected putting the right wheels in action for the attainment of the end in view. And Pippo rightly judged that the cordiality of his old friend, and the complacency with which he looked on the evident flirtation between him and Beppina, might be taken as a fair measure of the goodness of his hopes of success in obtaining that important object.

At length one day towards the end of Carnival, just as Pippo had returned from the Pitti, where he was busy in finishing his third commission for Mr. Patringham, to his new studio at San Barnaba,* he was agreeably surprised by a visit from his father-in-law *in posse*. He knew, before he opened the door, whose stick it was that was so vigorously battering it; for he had heard the

* A suppressed convent, now occupied by a numerous colony of painters and sculptors.

well-known thump on every step as the old man hobbled up the stairs; and his heart jumped into his throat with the sudden conviction that it must be something of importance which had brought the old gentleman so far out of his usual beat. Time had been when Pippo might have required a few moments to make all right in his studio for the reception of a guest of such a description. But everything there now was in perfect keeping with the new character of the tenant. He had only to cast a momentary glance towards the picture of the Madonna on the wall to see that the lamp beneath it was duly burning, before hastening to admit his visitor.

"Very busy, eh!" said the old man, entering, and taking a seat on the old green silk sofa of our acquaintance; "capital room you have got here, indeed! but I can't say much for your staircase. And all the fine gentlemen and the English ladies climb these

stairs to get at you, do they? In that case a poor Florentine tradesman ought not to grumble, I suppose. I dare say you are expecting somebody now, and I shall only be in the way of more profitable visitors."

Of course, Pippo protested that Signor Laudadio Benincasa was the most welcome and most honoured of all possible visitors.

"*Che! Che!** What should an old wax-chandler have to do in an artist's studio;—an artist who receives English visitors, and paints commissions for English *milordi?* Eh, Signor Pippo!"

"Yes! English milordi!" replied Pippo. "We poor devils of artists are obliged to work for any who will give us work to do; and the English money is very good money. But there might be better things to do than paint pictures for heretics, that is certain. Don't you think so, Signor Laudadio?"

* "What! what!" an ever-recurring exclamation in every Tuscan mouth.

"Such as a votive picture, commissioned in the highest quarter,—mark, I say the very highest,—well paid, and sure to set all Florence talking. That is what I call something like patronage of the fine arts! But then I am only an old-fashioned tradesman."

"And where, I should like to know," quoth Pippo sententiously, "would have been the great Tuscan school of painting, and the higher walks of art all over the world for that matter, had it not been for old-fashioned Florentine tradesmen of your sort, Signor Laudadio?"

"Ay! ay! You may say that, my boy. Our fathers did great things. But, bah! we live in very different times. We have fallen on degenerate days, Signor Pippo! Still it may be that the old spirit is not quite all dead yet!" said the old man as he got up and stumped across the room, fancying himself a Strozzi, or a Pitti, or an Albizzi, dispensing the magnificent patronage which

made the summer time of the *rénaissance*, and feeling that if only his rusty black coat, knee-breeches, and stockings could be changed for a flowing robe and scarlet hood, he could enact the part to the life. "Something there may be to be had by an artist of reputable character, Signor Pippo, of the right sort, you understand me, even yet."

Pippo felt sure now that the old man brought good news of the Santa Filomena project; and thinking that he had administered sufficient flattery to merit the disclosure of it, he remarked:—

"No doubt of it, my dear friend! And if one . . . . thoroughly of the right sort, as you say, were fortunate enough to have a patron thoroughly of the right sort, — a genuine descendant of those old-fashioned Florentine traders we spoke of,—he might perhaps find the means of making something of a reputation that would reflect honour on his friends. I was in hopes, to say the truth,

that you had come to speak of the portrait of Santa Filomena. I can take no interest in these things," he added, pointing to the unfinished picture on his easel, "since you fired my ambition by holding out a hope of that kind."

"I believe you, my boy! And old Laudadio is not the man to hold out expectations that mean nothing, nor to stretch out his arm so far that he does not know exactly where his hand is. And you knew that, eh? Yes! I did come to speak about the Santa Filomena. Now look here, and attend to what I am going to say. Take this address: —'The Most Rev. Don Marcantonio Capucci, Canon of San Lorenzo, and private Chaplain . . . .' but never mind all that. Basta! You remember seeing a reverend gentleman one day with me in my little counting-house at the *cereria*. That was he. But you are not to say a word of having seen him before, nor to mention me, you understand! You go to

that address, send in your name, and then speak when you are spoken to, and not before. Do you mark me?"

"Every word, my dear sir! I shall obey you scrupulously. When do you think I had better wait on his reverence?" said Pippo, in a great state of excitement.

"Now directly; or pretty nearly directly," said the other, looking at his watch; "you are to be there at five. It is nearly half-past four now. And look you, friend Pippo, there are two other things to be mentioned. First, say not a word to anybody about the matter. It is of no use to set people talking before hand. Let them talk when the picture is painted, eh! Pippo. And secondly, mind, if you are lucky enough to get this commission, all these little matters must stand over, you understand. The English milordi must wait. *Per Bacco!* They will be only too glad to have a bit of your canvas. The Santa Filomena will have to be painted out of

hand; and you must give yourself to it entirely."

"Of course, of course! You may depend on it, I shall think of nothing else," said Pippo.

"And now, my boy, I wish you good luck, and good-bye," said the old man, turning to go. "And Pippo," he added, as he opened the door of the studio, "you may as well come to the *cereria* in the evening, and tell us all about it. Beppina will be anxious to hear your news. She takes a great interest in matters of art, Beppina does."

"*Che! diamine!* * Do you think I should fail to do so?" returned Pippo. And so they parted; the artist remaining behind only to shut up his studio, and don his best coat, before starting for San Lorenzo.

* A Tuscan expletive difficult to render. The dictionaries give, "What the deuce!" but that does not give the sense. It is always used as assenting to a proposition, with surprise that the contrary should be deemed possible.

It will not be necessary for us to follow Signor Pippo Lonari in his visit to the cloister of San Lorenzo, or to detail the particulars of his interview with the reverend Canon Marcantonio Capucci. Of course, he was received with the most courteous politeness; but so he would have been had the business in hand been to condemn him to the stake. Of course, in opening to him the subject of the commission to be entrusted to him, the circumstances set forth as having attracted the favourable notice of the "exalted lady" for whom the picture was to be painted, were pure inventions; and of course, such an individual as the wealthy wax-chandler was never alluded to by either party. Of course, each knew that the other was aware that every word uttered by either of them was all falsehood and pretence, and each knew that the other knew that he knew it. But this did not in any degree diminish the satisfaction and advantage de-

rived from treating the matter with due regard to appearances and proprieties. The upshot of the whole was, that Pippo was commissioned to paint a full length picture of Santa Filomena, to be carried in a procession that was to take place in the Saint's honour; and he was particularly warned that the work must be ready by the coming Easter.

"I can, if you should wish it," said the smart and courteous ecclesiastic in conclusion, "furnish you with many particulars of the Saint's life and miracles. But, perhaps, as only a general representation is contemplated, you will prefer being left to the inspirations of your own genius. I believe, indeed, I could refer you to an ancient portraiture of the Saint; but," he added, with that peculiar smile which Roman Catholic ecclesiastics of the higher class are apt to assume when they wish to make themselves agreeable to educated laymen, in speaking

of Church matters, and which seems to imply a complimentary confidential understanding that the individual addressed is not the dupe of all that sort of thing, and an admission of his right to share the esoteric views of such matters, "it is very probable that you may produce us something more to the purpose if not tied down to a servile copying of the authentic features—something more attractive; more calculated to appeal to the heart, you understand. Female beauty will always exercise an immense influence; it is our duty to hallow it to its best uses, Signor Lonari."

"I shall endeavour to prove that I have appreciated the value of your reverence's remarks," said Pippo, bowing lowly.

"I have no doubt that we shall have reason to think ourselves fortunate in having entrusted the work to such able hands. Very possibly I may indulge myself with a look at the picture as it progresses, with

your permission. And, by-the-bye," he added, as he courteously bowed the artist to the door, "you had better leave me the address of your studio."

"Let those laugh who win," said Pippo to himself, as he passed by a dining-house, frequented by young artists, where he used formerly to dine, but which his present estimation in the guild had made it more agreeable for him to shun. "Let those laugh who win," he said, as he went off to a solitary dinner, "the day will come when any one of them will be only too glad of an invitation to dine at my table."

About a couple of hours later he found Beppina and her aunt evidently expecting him in the parlour behind the *cereria.*

"Well," cried Beppina, as he entered, "is it settled? Tell us all about it! What did his reverence say?"

"I'll begin by telling you what your father said, Signora Beppina," returned Pippo,

laughingly. "He specially charged me to say nothing about the matter to which you are probably alluding to anybody."

"Bah! I am nobody, and Aunt Assunta is discretion itself. Do you think papa has any secrets from me? He will be here himself directly, and will want to hear all about it; but I don't mean to wait till then. Is the picture ordered?"

"The picture is ordered, Signora Beppina. It is to be finished by Easter. His reverence the canon was exceedingly gracious: and truly I owe very many thanks to your good father."

"Ah! oh yes, to my father!" cried Beppina with a pout, and a half-laughing half-reproachful glance at Pippo, which said plainly enough that she thought some of the gratitude was due to her father's daughter.

Pippo placed his hand on his heart, and gave her a look meant to speak volumes of gratitude and tenderness, followed by an in-

quiring glance towards the old lady, as if to ask how much he might say in her presence.

Beppina answered his telegraph by saying, "Now, is it not hard, Aunt Assunta, that when I have been at papa day and night for weeks past to make him say a word for this gentleman here, for the sake of old times—for we were playmates together as children, you know—he should keep all his thanks for papa!"

"Thanks are mostly a payment on account to begin a new bill upon," said the old lady, with the caustic shrewdness so common among the Tuscan peasantry. "Signor Pippo, no doubt, knows where there's more to come from."

Beppina gave him a laughing look, as much as to say that she did not see that that view of the case ought to exclude her from participating in his gratitude; but she only said, "Well now, why don't you speak? Do tell us what was said, and all about it."

"Well, Signora Beppina, I think the principal directions given me were, that I must take care to do justice to the original. Santa Filomena was, it seems, wonderfully beautiful."

"Oh, indeed, that's charming. But I think all the saints must have been beautiful, if we are to go by the pictures you painters make of them. And I suppose all the beautiful women are saints. Well-a-day!"

"I have seen very beautiful girls who were not altogether saints, Signora Beppina," said Pippo.

"But you don't say a word of the main question, Signor Pippo," put in Aunt Assunta, "how much are you to have for the picture?"

"Why, the fact is," answered he, "that the Canon did not say a word about price, and I judged that it was wiser for me not to touch on that point."

And then Signor Laudadio came limping

in, very exultant, and full of congratulations. Pippo observed that he did not ask any questions, but seemed either to know all about the matter already, or else to take the result for granted.

"But he did not even ask about the price," persisted the old lady.

"The price! the price! of course he did not. I should hope not. Don't you fear about the price, my boy. We don't do things in that way, Sister Assunta," said the old gentleman, very magnificently.

"I was sure you would think I did right, sir," said Pippo, "in not touching upon that point. One drives a bargain with heretic foreigners, but not with such patrons as you and your friends."

"I, my dear boy! It is no patronage of mine," said old Laudadio, with a very unsuccessful imitation of humility. "Times have been, indeed," he went on, "as we were saying to-day, when art was beholden

to the patronage of simple tradesmen of Florence; and I have been thinking that if all goes well, hereafter . . . . After all, these canvas pictures are small matters. Fresco is the real artist's triumph. What should you say to a fresco on the wall of the *loggia* here looking on the garden, eh, Signor Pippo? And I have the subject in my head too."

The "things going well," to which old Laudadio's scheme of patronage was subordinated, meant in his mind Pippo's marriage with his daughter, which he had resolved should depend on the successful issue of the Filomena picture. And it had occurred to him, when Pippo's flattery had fired him with the notion of playing the Mecænas on the model of the old merchant-princes of Florence, that one of the purposes to which an artist son-in-law might be put, would be to get an immortality out of him gratis. And this was the genesis of the scheme for

the fresco. Pippo guessed all this with very considerable accuracy; and was well pleased with the favourable augury to be drawn for it for the realization of his hopes.

Fresco, he declared, had always been the great object of his ambition. The wall of the *loggia* afforded an admirable opportunity in all respects,—one that would link the artist's name, too, with the memory Signor Laudadio Benincasa would leave to many a generation after him. He was all impatience to learn the proposed subject.

"Oh! I was thinking of a miraculous interposition of the Virgin that occurred in the *cereria* in my father's time," said the old man, as quietly as if he had spoken of any ordinary accident. "A large boiling of wax caught fire one day . . . . . but we will talk of that hereafter. Now you have the picture to paint for her roy . . . . . for his reverence Canon Capucci, I would say; and

you must work hard and do your best; and, above all, be ready in time."

And so they separated; and Pippo went home in a very happy mood, feeling quite sure that his greatness was a-ripening.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE PORTRAIT OF SANTA FILOMENA.

THE judicious hints which the most reverend Canon Capucci had bestowed upon Pippo as to the nature of the picture expected from him, had not been cast on barren ground. The seminary-educated young artist understood the matter *à demi mot*. He comprehended perfectly well the mixture of earthly loveliness with seraphic expression, which the priesthood of Rome are so fond of using as a means of stimulating the devotion of the æsthetic and beauty-loving, but little spiritual-minded natures of their southern flocks. And he was earnestly bent on doing his utmost to secure a brilliant success on so important an occasion. To paint a beautiful

and attractive portrait of a female face and figure was not a very difficult task; and a very liberal allowance of easily delineated ordinary flesh-and-blood charms was not only permissible but imperative for the purpose in hand. But, after all, a saint is a saint, and must, to answer the object of her portraiture, be made to look like a saint; there must be the true expression. Nor will the mere maudlin look of half-meretricious sentimentality, which suffices for the beau-idéal of French religious art, content the more artistically trained, and, in truth, higher-toned natures of an Italian, especially of a Florentine, public.

All this Pippo knew; and his meditations on the subject during the night after he had received the order led him to the conclusion that the very thing which he needed was such a model as he had once possessed, and had cast away from him. Yes! that would be the thing! Could he but have that well-remembered face, with its purity of soul

shining through every feature; its sorrow-chastened look of mild resignation; its gentle, loving eyes to paint from, he felt sure he could produce a very telling saint. Pippo understood little, and reasoned to himself less of purity of soul and sorrow-chastened expression, as may be imagined. But his painter's eye told him that that was the thing he needed. Yes! there was no doubt about it. If he could but manage to have La Beata once more for a model his Santa Filomena would assuredly be a success; and on that success everything depended,—his future reputation,—Laudadio's patronage,—his marriage! For he had little doubt that this was to be one of the rewards of it.

But there were difficulties in the way of attaining this important object. La Beata! ..... pooh! she would only be too glad, poor girl; there was no danger of any opposition on her part. Pippo could not pretend to himself to feel any doubt that the very

slightest intimation of a wish from him would be as absolute a law to the clinging heart he had dismissed as it had ever been.

But there were other considerations. It was not pleasant, he could not help feeling, to go back after his long and utter neglect with a request which proved but too clearly that, but for his need of her, he would never have come at all. This, however, involved merely an unpleasant sensation to himself, which of course it was his duty to get over. It would be absurd to let any cowardice on the point interfere with such important interests. But, on the other hand, was it prudent to run the risk of undoing what had been so well and successfully done in the matter of that unfortunate connection? When he had managed in so masterly a manner to transfer La Beata from his home to her old one she had been utterly taken by surprise; and had never dreamed that the separation was to be a permanent one.

Yet what a lamentation and a piece of work she had made! *Now* if he were to renew anything like an intimate relationship with her, would she not at once fancy that all was to return to its former footing? and when she found that nothing of the kind was intended would she not resist being again summarily dropped in a manner that might prove embarrassing?

But still these were not the worst difficulties in the way. How was it possible, under the circumstances, for him to have her in daily attendance at his studio without giving rise to all sorts of injurious reports? Would it not be certainly said and supposed that they were on the same terms together as formerly? Might it not be difficult to persuade even old Laudadio that such was not the case? Might not the scandal which would be sure to arise be injurious to him with his new ecclesiastical patrons? And then that troublesome Patringham; he was always

coming to the studio to see how his picture was getting on. What a pretty kettle of fish there would be if he were to find La Beata there some day!

In short, the risks of all sorts, inseparable from bringing her to his studio, seemed altogether too great to be ventured on. And yet his imagination was full of the picture he felt sure he could paint, if he had but La Beata to paint from.

At last, after much debate with himself, he decided that the only feasible plan was to get the requisite sittings at the house in the Corso. Many, though not quite all the difficulties in the way, might be thus got over. La Beata would neither be led to suppose that she was to return to her former position, nor would she have any opportunity of giving him trouble when the time came for again getting rid of her. He would simply have to absent himself as before as soon as his object should be accomplished. Then

although it was almost impossible that he should have her daily at his studio without attention being drawn to the circumstance, it was far more easy for him to steal unobserved to the obscure dwelling of the widow Sappi.

Having decided on this, Pippo made up his mind that the rather unpleasant visit to La Beata, necessary for the arrangement of this plan, must be made the next morning. His easel, canvas, &c., could then be carried in the dark of the following evening to the widow Sappi's room, and he could get to work at once the next day; for the time which had been allowed him for the execution of the work was of the shortest, and it behoved him to lose as little as possible of it. And having arranged these plans in his mind, the rising artist sought, and quickly found, "that calm and dreamless rest which waits upon a good"—digestion.

The next morning, very shortly after daybreak, Pippo was at the widow Sappi's door.

Things had not changed for the better in the dreary and melancholy little household, since that sad new year's evening, now some two months since. The Carnival gaieties were not without their effect even there. They made work in the widow's line abundant. But the two poor women were less able than they had been to execute it. The widow was much troubled with her rheumatism, and since that new year's day Tina's health had been far feebler than before. She had a constant low fever hanging about her. There was an ominous blush of colour in the middle of her cheeks, always formerly so entirely pale. She could get no refreshing sleep. And though these symptoms were not urgent enough to prevent her from attempting to go through her daily task of toil, she felt from morning to evening so utterly weary and weak, that the day's labour no longer produced the same result as formerly.

Her health was mined, too, by that unhealthiest of all moral conditions, a genuine weariness of life. There are bodily constitutions, which resist for many long weary years all hints from the will, to the effect that it were better for them to break up and dissolve partnership with the spirit anxious to be released from them. But those frailer organizations, in which the slender and fine-run framework is hung upon the delicate and highly-tempered mainspring of a too sensitive nervous system, need the sunshine of happiness and the stimulus of hope to live at all. Drawing their principle of life in a greater degree from the spiritual, and in a less degree from the material portions of our nature, such lives are readily terminated by a refusal on the part of the volition to carry them on.

And our hapless Tina had, in truth, reached that degree of mental malady. Each morning called her to the weary work of filling

up amid suffering of body and mind the monotonous round of slow rolling hours, with painful toil for the sole purpose of finding the means to prolong a life, far worse, as it seemed to her, than valueless. Oh! that she could leave it all,—the bitter, bitter musings;—the craving, yearning, not-to-be-killed desire for the love she had lost;—the bodily pains;—the never ending unprogressing journey from morn to eve, and from evening to morning again! Oh! that she could be set free of it all, and go away to be where her mother had gone!

"Mother! mother! Pray for me to the loving mother of God to take me to be with her and with you! For I am all alone here, where no one loves me; and I am miserable and very, very weary! Oh, Holy Virgin mother, leave me not all alone in this dreary wilderness with none to pity me and none t love me!"

Nightly prayers such as these, so con-

stant and so fervent, were, however blindly breathed, sure to conduce towards their own accomplishment. And by the end of Carnival, when Pippo came early in the raw spring morning on the errand we wot of, La Beata, just risen from her night's unrest to go through the toil and petty cares of yet one more dreary day, had become very visibly changed from what she had been, when last Pippo had seen her, some ten weeks previously.

To the eye of a physician, or to the instinctively sharpened insight of affection, the alteration would have appeared ominous and sad enough. The first would have plainly discerned the tokens of incipient organic malady. The second would hardly have failed to divine grounds for anxiety in the perfidious colouring of the cheek, the nervous restlessness combined with languid atony of the bearing, and the febrile lustre of the eye. To the eye of an artist in search

of a model for the special purpose Pippo had in view, the change observable in her could hardly have appeared otherwise than a favourable one. That insidious and hateful hectic, which suffused the clear cold white of the centre of the cheek with the hue of the blush-rose, was in itself, to unknowing or uncaring eyes, exquisitely beautiful. If the cheeks were somewhat too sunken to be compatible with even saintly beauty, a touch of the brush would easily remedy that. But the expression was the treasure ! worth anything ! as Pippo said to himself on his walk back to his studio after the first sitting. The infinite melancholy of that gentle smile, sadder than tears, which betrayed, as she sat before the easel discharging the old function of her happier days, the unreasoning and instinct-like gratification she could not help feeling from the mere fact of his presence, though she drew from it no slightest ray of hope for the future, —that smile was invaluable. The large eyes,

with their deep liquid fever-fed brilliance, appeared to have usurped a larger share than ever of the small delicate face. And the strange half-dreamy, half-wistful outlook from them, which seemed to seek its object in some far, far-away distance, and which was the expression of that longing desire of the broken spirit to fly away and be at peace,—all this was, as the intelligent artist confessed to himself, "the very thing."

She derived from this visit, it has been observed, no hope that mercy had been extended to her at the eleventh hour, and that her sentence was to be reversed. She had none such, as she sat to do his behest before the easel. It is true, that on his unexpected entrance into the room for a few moments,—a very short space of time, though long enough for the quickly succeeding revulsion to be exquisitely painful,—she had imagined that all the interval of misery and despair since her departure from the *Via dell' Amore*

was to be blotted out like a baleful dream; that it had all been some huge mistake; and that everything had suddenly come right again. But Pippo had come there with the distinctly formed intention of "showing every kindness to the poor girl, which was possible under the circumstances," and he considerately took care to disabuse her of so untoward an error as quickly as possible.

She would probably have recognized his footfall on the stair had she not been at the moment in her own little closet at the back of the house. She was just entering the living and working-room by the door at the back of it, which communicated with her sleeping-room, when he, having been admitted by the widow, came in by the door opening on the passage. The shock was overwhelming; and at first seemed well-nigh to have done the kindly office of releasing her.

"Pippo!" she shrieked, throwing out both

arms wildly towards him. But her limbs refused to second the impulse. She was not able to cross the small floor to the spot where he stood; and had not Marta Sappi quickly drawn a chair and placed her in it, she would have fallen. She did not, however, altogether lose her consciousness; for though the eyes were closed, and the head drooped on the shoulder, the two arms remained outstretched towards him. After a minute or two her chest heaved convulsively with a deep-drawn breath; she opened her eyes, and still holding out the poor thin longing arms—

"At last, Pippo, my love! always my own love!—at last!" she cried.

The respectable and prudent artist was, it must be admitted, somewhat disconcerted at this greeting. He had prepared himself for reproaches, and for the annoyance of a few feminine tears. But that all he flattered himself he had achieved by his

prudent forethought and care, all the results of the systematic and judiciously-graduated neglect of months, should be thus utterly ignored, was embarrassing. Was she absolutely impervious to the teaching of facts? Had she not even yet reached the comprehension that it was impossible that their youthful and sadly reprehensible folly should be persisted in? Was there ever so obstinately or so stupidly unteachable a woman! He paused for a moment to consider the best mode of meeting this strange line of conduct, and decided, with much presence of mind, that it would be useless to attempt to reply to such tirades, and that if she would persist in following out her view of their relative position, the only plan for him was firmly and consistently to act up to his own conception of the matter, and, as the phrase goes, *live down* her unreasonableness.

So he said, as he advanced towards her, "Yes, Tina, here I am at last, for a purpose

I will tell you presently, when you have got over your surprise at seeing me. Give us your hand, for the sake of old times, eh?"

It was enough. The living down process had been very quickly and thoroughly accomplished. Her head fell on her bosom, and all her body seemed to collapse and shrink. He took her passive, idly-hanging hand in his, and then she looked up dry-eyed; but the strange wistful glance did not so much rest on him as pass over and beyond him, as if seeking something far away. And her lips moved, but gave out no sound.

Then bringing back her eyes to his face, she said, quietly and slowly, "Still I am glad to see you, Pippo; very glad to see your face yet once again."

"*Che! che!* once again!" returned he, much reassured by the turn the matter had taken; "we shall have many a talk over these old times when we are both old greyheads. Besides, if you are kind enough, as

I think you will be, Tina, to do me the favour I am come to ask of you, we shall have to meet every day for some weeks to come."

"A favour, Pippo! I! And we are to meet every day? . . . . but always . . . . like this. That will be hard, Pippo! . . . . and yet . . . ."

"You won't refuse me, Tina! It is a matter of importance to me," said he, supposing she was doubting whether she should consent or not.

"Refuse, Pippo! I! Why, am I not your own, Pippo? always your own Tina, to do what you will with? Nothing can change that!"

"Well but, Tina, now; let us talk reasonably. What I want of you is this: I have a commission for an important picture—a portrait of Santa Filomena. It must be completed by Easter, and there is no time to be lost. Now in all Florence there is nobody would be so good a model for a Santa Filo-

mena as yourself. I am sure I shall make a good thing of it if you will help me."

"When must I come to the studio, Pippo?"

"Well, I have been thinking about that, Tina, and I have considered that it will be much less trouble to you if I take the sittings here, . . . . that is, always, if La Signora Sappi will permit me to make use of her room."

The widow Sappi's notions of morality were not of a delicate or exacting kind, but she did not just then feel kindly towards the painter. That such loves as those of poor Tina and Pippo Lonari should come to a conclusion at the pleasure and convenience of the stronger party, to the infinite ruin and heart-break of the weaker, was an incident too much within her experience of the world and its ways, too much a matter of course, for her moral indignation to be much moved by it. But she had been painfully shocked

by the violence of the contrast between the two hearts as exhibited in the scene which had been enacted before her. "Men will be men to the end of the chapter," as she expressed it to a gossip of hers afterwards; "but I felt as if I could have scratched his handsome eyes out to see him take it so coolly, and she a-pouring out her heart's blood before his eyes for love of him!"

But she only said, in reply to Pippo's words, "Anything, signor, for the convenience or pleasure of *la poveretta.* I am sure it's little enough that she is able or fit to do, though it is not the will that is wanting, poor dear!"

"Well, then, we'll arrange it so," returned Pippo. "I will send my easel and things here this evening, and to-morrow morning, Tina, we will have our first sitting. Of course," he added, after a little pause, "I shall not let the time you give me be a loss to you, Tina. That would not be fair to La

Signora Sappi, you know. I shall make a point of paying your sittings at the usual price, you know."

She raised her eyes to his with an expression of infinite suffering, while the hectic blush on her cheek spread itself over her pale brow. But not even this last blow could stir her to resentment. She only said—

"Not that, Pippo! that must not be. I have told you that I am all yours, and only yours. You cannot pay me for my sittings."

He had been almost ashamed to make the proposal, and had done so rather to propitiate the widow than for any other reason.

"Well," said he, "I only spoke for the sake of La Sappi. If you are sitting to me you cannot be making flowers for her, you know. I only want to do what is right. That ought to be the rule for all of us, Tina," he added, with the sententious superiority of an intensely self-conscious morality.

"Well, then," said the widow, with that

ready eye to the main chance which makes so prominent a feature in the Tuscan character, and by no means desirous of sparing Signor Lonari's pocket, "if that is it, you shall pay me for the use of my room. That will be no more than what is right. Though it was not likely that that poor little thing was going to take your money, as I should have thought your honour must have known."

"Very well, then, so be it. I suppose it comes much to the same thing," said Pippo, not with a very good grace.

And with that he took himself off.

In the evening, after dusk, Pippo's painting tools were brought to the widow's room. And the following morning with the earliest light he was there to begin his work.

They were strangely-passed hours, those sittings in the little flower manufactory, with the easel and the model in front of one little window, and the widow with her gay bits of coloured stuff, her tools and her flowers, at

the other. Very few words were spoken. Pippo's heart was wholly in his work. Never had he begun a sketch from La Beata which seemed to promise so well, and in which she appeared to him to hit off more perfectly, or to embody more successfully the required conception. The satisfactory progress of the work beneath his hand, and the anticipation of success, kept him in high spirits and excellent good humour.

Tina would have found it difficult to say whether the hours thus passed were more a source of gratification or of pain. It was certain that on those few days when Pippo did not come to his work, the blank was a disappointment to her. The consciousness that she was contributing to his success was very gratifying to her. The sitting—or standing rather, for the latter was the attitude chosen for the picture—was extremely fatiguing; and it was soothing to her to feel that she was exerting her last remaining

strength and energies in his service. She had a melancholy pleasure, too, in finding herself once again engaged in her old office, and standing, so far at least, in the same relation towards him which she had occupied in happier days. There was a pleasure in this, but it was a very sad one; and many a long hour of the night was passed by her in weeping over every little point of contrast with the days gone by suggested to her imagination by each turn of his voice and shade of his manner during the day's work.

For Pippo prescribed to himself, and admirably observed, a line of conduct of the strictest consistency. To most men, even of those capable of making for themselves such a conjuncture of circumstances, it would have been impossible to avoid the touch of some small heart-probing memory, some suggestive association, impelling them to yield at least momentarily to the sway of former feelings. Not so Pippo. He was too com-

pletely self-sustained to be guilty of such weakness. Any exclusive and thoroughly monopolizing passion is a source of power. And this power was supplied to him by the intensity of his selfishness. He saw clearly, as he fancied, what his interests and fortunes required in the matter; and he ruled his conduct accordingly with the undivided enthusiasm of a fanatic.

And so the picture of Santa Filomena was painted.

The select few who were permitted to see it on the easel were loud in praise of the admirable conception and execution of the work. His reverence Canon Capucci had seen it two or three times while it was in progress; for cautious Pippo, remembering the word the priest had let drop as to the possibility of his visiting the studio, and fearing that he might do so, perhaps repeatedly, and find him always absent, had taken the precaution of calling on him, and

requesting that he would afford the work the great advantage of his judgment and criticism, and visit it for that purpose on a day when the artist should let him know that the picture was at a point to make his observations the most valuable. He had accordingly carried the picture to his studio two or three times, on each of which occasions the priest had been invited to visit it. And every time he had cordially expressed his admiration and approval.

In fact, it was a striking picture;—somewhat hastily painted and dashed in *alla brava*, as was inevitable from the shortness of time allowed for the work, though Pippo, to do him justice, had laboured with constancy from morning to night upon it;—but full of spirit, admirably expressive, and well calculated for the purpose for which it was intended. The attitude chosen was very like that of the Saint Cecilia in Raffael's celebrated picture at Bologna. But the hands

were clasped in front of the body; and the long and abundant hair, — that beautiful wavy hair of Tina's, which had alone retained all its beauty unimpaired,—flowed unconfined over the shoulders. Pippo's directions to his model had been to assume an expression of prayer and intercession. It had been of late the most familiar of all expressions to her features. And as she stood there before him, with the thoughts we wot of passing through her heart and brain, it is probable that she had not much need to simulate the expression required.

It was about ten days before Easter when Pippo announced that he should need no further sittings, and that he should that evening send for his picture and easel, to complete the work at his studio. The sudden announcement, which he had purposely made as sudden as might be, "to avoid what might be disagreeable to both parties," was a shock to La Beata. Sad as were all the suggestions

and surrounding circumstances of her daily task for some weeks past, she had come to look for it, and would have preferred that it should be continued. She no longer flattered herself that it was at all likely she should see Pippo again unless some new need brought him to her. And it seemed to her little likely that this should occur before the hour of her own release should arrive. And the thought that she might perhaps never see his face again was heavy upon her as he stood on the point of leaving the widow's room.

"I shall see you again once more before I die, Pippo?" she said, as he took her passive hand in his to wish her good-bye; "will you promise me that, Pippo?"

"Pooh! pooh! what reason have you to talk about dying? Of course, we shall see each other often and often again. I am sure I hope so!" said he.

"But promise me for the once!" she in-

sisted, speaking with solemnity, and looking with those sad large eyes into his, with an expression that almost awed him;—"promise me that if I send to you, and tell you it is for the last time, you will come to me!"

"Of course! of course, I shall come to you if you ask me to do so, last time or not, Tina. I wish you would not talk in such a ridiculous manner."

"At all events, I have your promise, Pippo! I hardly think I could rest quietly in my grave if you were not to keep it," she rejoined with sad earnestness.

And so they parted.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE PROCESSION AND THE TRIUMPH.

Pippo did not feel altogether comfortable as he walked home from the *Via del Corso* to his studio. Everything was going well with him. He was contented with his picture; his patrons, and all who had seen it, praised it; and he anticipated no small triumph from the public exhibition of it. Old Laudadio grew more cordial in his manner from day to day; Beppina was more than gracious, and always scolded him if he omitted his all but nightly visit to the *cereria*. He could hardly doubt that all his great hopes were about to be realized, and that a career more prosperous than he had ever dreamed of a few months ago was before him. Yet he

could not prevent his mind's eye from resting on La Beata and her history, as on a dark spot in the bright landscape.

Those last words of hers, and her manner of saying them, would recur to his imagination and irked him. He had acted in strict accordance with prudence and duty in the matter, as he repeated to himself over and over again. And what stuff had she got in her head about dying! She did not look at all like dying!—looked better, indeed, much better than when she was with him in the *Via dell' Amore*,—had got a colour in her cheeks now, which was more than she ever used to have. See him once again! A parcel of romantic girlish nonsense! No doubt, he should see her again, the wife of some honest tradesman or other, and then he would paint her picture for her,—a family group with three or four lumping brats around her.

But still it would not do! The deep, so-

lemn look of those melancholy far-away looking eyes would haunt him;—tormented him, till the expression of them, and the words which had accompanied it, became fixed in his mind; and the simple promise, exacted by poor Tina's clinging love, seemed to take the form of a menace. There was something too in those sunken cheeks, and in that dreary lassitude of manner which, talk to himself as he might about girlish nonsense, made this menace of one more meeting on this side of the grave a subject of uneasiness and almost of fear to him.

The best remedy in the world, however, for unpleasant thoughts was ready for him, when he reached his studio, in the shape of hard work. The completion of his picture by the last day in Lent, according to the terms he had agreed to, would require the most assiduous labour during the ten days which remained to him. And in fact, during that time he did work from the earliest to the

latest light, and only left his studio, to eat a hurried bit of dinner in the evening, before going to labour at that other great work he had in hand at the *cereria*, the winning of the heiress of it.

At last the final touches had been put to Santa Filomena, and with the exception of the varnishing, which it had been decided should be done after the procession, the picture was finished, and on the last day of Lent carried, by direction of Canon Capucci, to the sacristy of a small church on the further, or Pitti, side of the Arno, where at an hour named, his reverence, with three or four other persons, were waiting to receive it. The artist was welcomed with many compliments, and the picture was much admired by the small company in the sacristy. The Canon had little or no doubt, he said, that the exalted personage for whom the work had been executed, would be perfectly well satisfied with it; and that if Signor Lonari

would call on him at San Lorenzo that evening at eight, he hoped to be able then to signify to him the approval of his employer, and would, at the same time, pay him for his work.

Pippo was, as may be supposed, punctual to his appointment. Even a Tuscan can contrive to be so when he has to receive money.

The Canon was more gracious than ever. The exalted lady had been pleased to express her entire approval, and admiration of the picture. She had even gone the length of saying that it satisfactorily embodied her own conception of the Saint's features and character—which, under the circumstances was remarkable—and she had much pleasure in forwarding by his, the Canon's, hands a sum in payment, which it was hoped would be satisfactory.

The sum therewith handed to him by his reverence was ridiculously inadequate to the

payment of his work, even at journeyman's wages for the days he had laboured. Pippo, however, transferred it to his pocket with a low bow, and many thanks for the liberality with which he had been treated, and proceeded at once to write an acknowledgment of payment in full. "Right-thinking" people have no difficulty in understanding each other. And when about ten days afterwards Pippo received an intimation that one of the several studios in a building belonging to the State, which had formerly been a convent, but was now divided into a number of excellent studios for such right-thinking sculptors and painters as seemed worthy of so much favour, was placed at his disposition, he understood perfectly well that the money he had received from Canon Capucci was the smallest part of the payment for his picture. And when, a little while afterwards, he received a summons to the palace of one of the wealthiest and most orthodox

nobles in Florence, and was honoured by a very liberal commission to paint a portrait of the daughter of the house, who was about to be married, he had no doubt as to the channel by which he had been recommended for the purpose, and felt how perfectly right he had been, in making no difficulty about the remuneration for the Santa Filomena.

Of course, immediately after leaving his reverence Canon Capucci, Pippo hurried to the *cereria*, where he found his friends eagerly awaiting the result.

"Well, my boy, has it pleased? Has it given satisfaction in high quarters? Was his reverence content?" asked Signor Laudadio.

And when Pippo was able to answer all these questions satisfactorily,

"Ah!" said he, "I had no doubt about it, since I saw the picture. I knew the effect it would produce! I congratulate you with all my heart, my dear boy. And you

won't feel proud to-morrow, when all Florence is admiring your work! Oh, no! not at all! This is better than making copies for Englishmen, eh!"

"You don't know how curious I am to see the picture, 'gnor Pippo," said Beppina. "You know I am to walk in the procession with twenty other girls—that is with nineteen others, for there are to be twenty of us in all—and I shall see nothing but the back of the picture all the way. Then after us will follow the singers, and then the priests with the *santissimo;* and after them all the members of the new confraternity, and papa among them. So that there's only Aunt Assunta who will *see* the procession; we shall have to make it. What a grand day it will be! I have got my white dress all ready, and my wreath of white roses came home just now. I have not tried it on yet. I'll run and get it, and you shall tell me how to put it on."

"A pretty fatiguing job it will be for me with my poor leg, I doubt," said old Laudadio, "all across the bridge, and through the *Piazza*, and half way up the *Via Calzaiuoli*, then all along the *Corso*, and so by the *Via del Proconsolo*, and the *Duomo*, and the *Via dei Servi*, to the *Santissima Annunziata*. There is to be a short service at *Or' San Michele* and at the *Duomo;* and that will give one time to rest a few minutes. But I don't mind owning to you, friend Pippo, that I shall be glad when it's over."

Here pretty Beppina came tripping in with her white moss-rose wreath; and then there was a long coquetting consultation about how it should be worn, whether a little backwarder or a little forwarder, and how the magnificent abundance of black hair should be worn under it. And Pippo, as he gave his artistic advice on these points, could not help feeling that Beppa Benincasa would be an extremely attractive girl, even had she

not been heiress to the *cereria*, and all the savings that had been accumulated from it.

"I know what you will be thinking of at the procession to-morrow, Signor Pippo," said she; "you will be thinking of the day when Giotto's Madonna was carried through *Borg' Allegri*, and saying in your heart that some one of the streets we pass through, at least, ought henceforward to be called *Via di Santa Filomena*, when you see all the town delighted with your picture."

"I am afraid," returned he, "that all the town will find something in the procession much more worth looking at than my picture; and at all events I am quite sure," he added, as he stood close behind her looking over her shoulder at her face in the great glass on the console, before which she was trying her wreath, "I am quite sure that I shall be thinking of somebody else than Giotto or the Madonna either."

"Fie!" said Beppina in a state of great

delight; "I am sure I shall be thinking only of my prayers, unless it may be a little now and then of keeping the wax of the tapers from falling on my new white dress."

"And now that the picture is painted and done," said Aunt Assunta, "I suppose you know what you are to get for it? How much is it, Signor Pippo?"

"Oh! I was paid at once in the most liberal manner," returned he; "but I took little heed of the amount. One does not think so much of that part of the matter when one works for the church and the advancement of religion, Signora Assunta."

"That's right, my dear boy!" cried the old wax-chandler; "those are the right sentiments; and nothing is ever lost by them in the long run; trust an old man!"

"I felt sure, my dear sir, that you would approve of my looking at the matter in that light," said Pippo, affecting to put himself

in the relationship of a dutiful and respectful son towards the old man.

"And you were quite right. And I say Pippo, you will eat a bit of dinner here with us after the ceremony to-morrow. Per Bacco, I shall want my dinner by that time: and then in the evening, if you can get Beppina to give you leave, we will go into my counting-house together and have a little talk."

Pippo seemed to walk on air as he returned to his studio that night. He was quite sure what the little talk was to be about. "It's all right, and no mistake about it," said he to himself; "the cautious old fellow has been waiting to see the success of the picture. I thought as much. Beppina is ready enough; no fear of her!" And with these exulting thoughts in his head he went to bed; and dreamed that as he was looking over Beppina's shoulder at her rose-crowned head in the glass, the figure gradually changed to that of La Beata, with wan

face and strange-looking, large eyes beckoning him to her death-bed.

But the dark hours and the dark thoughts passed away together; and the morning of Easter Sunday, the great day of triumph for Pippo and Santa Filomena, was ushered in by as bright a sun as the most eager devotee of the newly-promoted saint could desire.

The procession was to take place in the afternoon; and it had been arranged that Pippo should escort Aunt Assunta and Beppina to the grand ceremonial service at the Duomo in the morning; Signor Laudadio declaring that he should content himself with hearing a low mass before breakfast, and should then keep quiet to prepare himself for the extraordinary exertions of the afternoon.

In general the grand ecclesiastical ceremonies of Roman Catholic countries are apt to appear to a sober Protestant Englishman utterly unlike anything answering to

his idea of the duty and advantage of going to church. But the grand Easter service at the cathedral of Florence cannot seem, one would think, to any human being of any communion to have aught in common with a meeting for the purpose of worship. A great number of the peasantry from the neighbouring country are wont to flock into the city on the occasion, not so much for the sake of being present at the mass, as to witness a very singular ceremony peculiar to Florence, which has been practised there from a very remote antiquity, on the day before Easter Sunday.

The mass itself is also, of course, an attraction. The music is nought. And it is a curious fact that among a people so musical church music should stand at a lower ebb than in any other country in Europe. The frequenters of Italian churches prefer that all the money which can be afforded for the splendour of the church functions should be

expended for the eye rather than for the ear; and of course the reverend personages who have to cater for their tastes in such matters understand and minister to their preference. Hence abundance of upholstery, magnificent hangings, and splendid illuminations are to be seen in the churches; but very little good music is ever to be heard.

On the occasion in question, it is true, there would be little possibility of hearing it, be it what it might. A line from the west door to the altar is kept by troops for the passage of the court and the courtiers, all in their best gilt coats, and the archbishop and *his* court in their still more magnificent braveries. But the whole of the remaining space of the enormous church is filled with a mass of people packed as closely as they can stand. It is a wonder that there is never either disorder or noise on such occasions. But the never-failing gentleness, courtesy, and good humour of the Tuscan character are such as to induce

every one, whether citizen or peasant, to bear his share in the discomfort of the jam cheerfully, and to inconvenience his neighbour as little as possible. Here and there in the close-packed mass of human beings a voice may be heard in the midst of the service raised in anger; but the words uttered are sure to be English from one or the other side of the Atlantic; and perhaps a strange, swaying movement may be observed in the crowd, like a circumscribed eddy in a large piece of water; but this, too, will be found to be caused by the frantic efforts of some English or American cavaliers, who have been stupid enough to bring ladies into the crowd, and are exhibiting prowess "worthy of a better cause," in striving to keep them from contact with the commonalty, who look on with tolerant and amused, but utterly mystified wonderment.

But the sight which has attracted most of the country folks to the city is the *scoppio*

*del carro*, which takes place precisely at mid-day on the Saturday. The "blowing up of the car" is effected in this wise. A huge structure of timber some thirty or forty feet high is raised on wheels and drawn to the front of the great western door of the cathedral, in the space between it and the baptistry; this is the "carro." It is adorned with garlands and abundantly hung all over with crackers, and rockets, and detonating fireworks of all sorts; and a long line, of which one end is fixed to the high altar, passes down the nave of the church and out through the wide open doors, and is at the other end attached to the *carro*. The ancient practice, continued till recently, was, at a certain point in the celebration of the mass to let loose a dove with a light affixed to its tail, attached in such a manner to the line which has been described that it could fly in the direction of the *carro*, but in no other. The intention was, as will be under-

stood, that the dove should carry the light to the gunpowder prepared for it, and so fire all the pyrotechnic devices on the car. And upon the due success of this manœuvre the peasants founded auguries as to the agricultural prosperity or the reverse of the coming summer—auguries which were so implicitly and extensively believed that it became a matter of serious consequence that the dove should not fail in his very undovelike mission. Yet, as may easily be imagined, failures often took place. Modern ingenuity, however, and the "march of mind" have remedied this, and found the means of compelling the augury to be favourable. A model of a dove, so contrived as to run along the cord and carry the match with certainty, is now substituted for the real bird; and the "scoppio del carro" takes place with the utmost regularity, and prophesies admirable harvests every year, to the perfect contentment of the Tuscan agricultural mind.

Pippo duly conducted home Beppina and her chaperon, both highly delighted with their morning's amusement,—the first naturally enough, as all lads and lasses will understand, and the second somewhat less intelligibly, with having been hustled by a metropolitan crowd, and become entitled to some infinitesimal share of an archiepiscopal blessing;—and leaving them to make their preparations for the ceremonial in the afternoon, in which at least Beppina was to be a more prominent actor, went off rather nervously to bethink him what he should do during the procession.

Of course he was anxious to witness the impression he expected his picture would produce; and, moreover, if he were to shut himself up the while, it was probable that his absence might be remarked, and would appear very strange. But he was by no means easy about the passing off of the ceremony as regarded himself. The natural

thing would have been for one in his place to have made a party with three or four friends and comrades of the brush, and so mixed with the crowd at different points in the procession. On such occasions one wants the support and countenance of friends. But Pippo had no friends among his old comrades. He was not only isolated but regarded, as he was well aware, with hostility and contempt by most of them. He was perfectly well aware that the story of his desertion of La Beata, and the motive for that desertion, was well known to the whole confraternity of artists. And he was especially afraid of the comments and questions that were likely to be caused when it should be observed, as it infallibly would by those who had most of them known her features so well, who it was that had served him as a model for the new picture. He did not very clearly account for the feeling to himself; but he was exceedingly unwil-

ling to hear any remarks or be called on to answer any questions on that subject.

Though he did not think it prudent to take the strong step of altogether disguising himself, he put on a hat as unlike that he usually wore as possible, and a cloak which he was not in the habit of using; and hoping thus to escape notice, sallied forth about the time the procession was to start, and posted himself near the corner of the Piazza, trying hard to assume the air of not being there in waiting for anything in particular. But he had to wait so long that he began to think that something had occurred to put off the ceremony.

At last, however, as he was on the point of going towards the bridge to see if such were indeed the case, the droning voices of a dozen or so of men chanting the litanies which had been prepared for the occasion, were heard approaching from the *Via Vaccherecia;* and in a minute or two afterwards

the procession began to defile into the great Piazza. There were first a score or so of men in shabby white gowns over their coats, with Signor Laudadio limping along at the head of them, each having a huge wax taper in his hand, and vociferating with all the power of his lungs. Then came THE PICTURE, borne aloft by two porters, also in dirty white gowns, and kept steady by others holding cords fixed to the top of it. Then came the clergy and the host, and after them the company of twenty young girls, all in white, and all with white wreaths on their heads, among whom our little friend Beppina very conspicuously bore the bell. The procession was closed by a company of Capuchin friars, always had out to do duty on similar occasions. "All Florence" following in the wake of the procession, was represented by a few score of old men and women, chiefly the latter, of the poorest classes, who, having no amusement of any kind for their Sunday afternoon,

thought they might as well as not earn a few days' indulgence, and take the chance of being favourably noticed by the clergy. The cortège was of course attended by the usual number of ragged urchins from ten to fifteen years old. But these were as usual engaged in assiduously collecting the droppings from the great wax candles, each person in the procession being flanked by one of these attendants, holding a funnel-shaped piece of dirty paper under his candle. The eccentric motion imparted to old Laudadio's candle by his lameness made the task of gathering his spoils a lucrative but proportionally an arduous one.

Pippo hardly knew whether to be more disappointed at the small interest the whole affair seemed to excite or glad of the absence of all those likely to know anything of him and his private affairs. He followed the procession as far as the corner of the *Via del Corso;* but there stopped. *She* would be

sure, he thought, to be looking out of the window as the procession passed by; and he felt that he would rather just then avoid meeting that countenance.

The *Via Calzaiuoli* is always full of people on a fine Sunday afternoon; and Santa Filomena and her attendants had in that part of their progress, therefore, to make their way through almost a crowd. It was just where there were most people, about the corner of the *Corso*, that Pippo, as he stood under a doorway while the procession passed on, suddenly heard his name, "Lonari," mentioned by an evidently foreign tongue. Turning quickly in the direction of the voice, and at the same time bringing the fold of his cloak over the lower part of his face, he saw Mr. Patringham with his daughter on his arm, who was evidently pointing out to her father his picture. She had clearly recognized the features of "Signora Lonari," as she called her; and was urging her

father to ascertain, if he could, whether the picture had in fact been painted from her.

"What devil's luck brought those heretics here to look at the procession?" thought Pippo to himself. But the worst was to come; for the next moment he saw Mr. Patringham, leaving his daughter's arm for a moment, step up to an elderly man standing on a doorstep not three yards from him, and heard him say—

"Pray, sir, can you tell me if it is known after what original that picture of the saint has been painted?"

"It has been painted after a poor girl whom the artist seduced and then most infamously deserted. I suppose he will be made president of the Academy in consequence!" said Signor Borsoli, the *frondeur*, as he turned on his heel and walked off; for the old gentleman to whom Mr. Patringham had addressed himself was, as it chanced, no other than our old acquaintance.

"I am afraid there is an ugly story here," said Mr. Patringham, returning to his daughter. "I will tell you another time. Signor Tanari ought not to have introduced me, as he did, to that man."

All this passed within earshot of Pippo, and tended not a little to spoil the enjoyment of his day of triumph. Disagreeables, as he foresaw, would arise from this discovery.. Was it on the cards that any such scandal attaching to his name should reach the ears of the old wax-chandler, as might interfere with his intentions regarding Beppina?

Pippo debated this question with himself anxiously, as he walked home to prepare for the important dinner, and evening at the *cereria*. But it appeared to him that there was very small probability that the talk of a social circle so widely divided from that of his proposed father-in-law should reach him, and if it should in some degree do so, it might

easily be pooh-poohed as mere calumny born of envy and jealousy. "Only let me get on, till Beppina and I are one," thought he to himself, "and I shall care little what they say."

* * * *

"And now Tanari, and Patringham, and the rest of them, may quarrel it out as they like. I can afford to laugh at them all!" said Pippo, as returning from the grand dinner at the cereria, he threw himself into an easy chair, and gave himself up to the pleasant occupation of castle-building on a very satisfactorily sound foundation.

For that evening all had been settled between him and Signor Benincasa and Beppina. And he had been presented to the party assembled, consisting of one or two of the priests who had officiated in the procession, Signor Marradi the *fattore*, and Aunt Assunta, together with two or three old friends of the family and their wives, as the son-in-law elect of the wealthy wax-chandler.

## CHAPTER XV.

### TINA'S LETTER.

THE marriage had been fixed for the twenty-fourth of June,—the nativity of St John,—the great Florentine festival of the year. On the vigil of that day are celebrated the games,—the races of chariots built in the form of the ancient biga, drawn by steeds caparisoned in accurately copied mediæval style—(and supplied for the occasion by the post-horse office)—and driven by analogously costumed charioteers—(travestied post-boys of the same establishment). On the day itself take place the races of riderless horses, through the flag-paved and densely crowded streets of the town, according to the old intensely civic spirit, which insisted on having

its amusements, as well as its more serious interests, inside the city walls;—the same spirit that was wont to celebrate "wild beast hunts" in the great square, and represent pirate ships on cruise in the streets. On the vigil there are the grand fireworks on the Carraia bridge, and the whole course of the Arno, and the mighty dome of the cathedral, the matchless tower of Giotto, and the ancient palace of the republic are ablaze with illuminations.

Most of the throng of visitors of all nations, who come to winter at Florence have quitted it before the time comes round for this high Florentine festival. A few may have been induced to delay their departure for the baths and other summer resorts for the sake of witnessing the city of flowers at its mediæval masquerading. But the crowd has gone; and the Florentines are left to live their own lives, and enjoy their summer holiday.

Pippo was not made uneasy by this delay.

When the ceremony of betrothal had taken place, he considered himself safe. After that has occurred, there are fewer slips between cup and lip in such matters in continental life than among ourselves. Ladies are not allowed the same latitude in the privilege of changing their minds. Those who are "fidanzati" are held to be, though not absolutely and irrevocably, yet morally and by social opinion bound to each other. And Pippo had no fear, that either his eminently respectable father-in-law or his promised bride would think of breaking, unless on very serious grounds indeed, the pledge of betrothal.

The intervening weeks passed pleasantly enough in installing himself in the new studio gratuitously placed at his disposition by the government,—in executing one on two profitable commissions, which his new connexion had already procured for him,—in nightly visits to the *cereria*,—and in dreaming

very securely that his greatness was a-ripening. One or two little unpleasantnesses occurred ; but he strove to make up his mind to care nothing about them. The copy he had made for Mr. Patringham in the Pitti gallery had long since been sent home and paid for. But the picture, which that gentleman had ordered, and which has been described in a former chapter, was still unfinished, when the order for the Saint Filomena had been given; and had been laid aside while that more important commission had been in progress. When it was finished Pippo felt rather at a loss how to proceed in the matter. He was extremely unwilling, with the recollection of that little conversation, overheard at the corner of the *Via del Corso* on the day of the procession in his mind, to present himself before Mr. Patringham, from whom since that day he had heard nothing. Nor could he make up his mind to send his picture to him, as a tailor might send home

a coat, with his bill. After some meditation, therefore, he determined to send the picture to Signor Tanari, with the request that he would be the medium of its transfer to Mr. Patringham, and mentioning that the price agreed upon was so much, and that as a matter of course Signor Tanari would deduct his commission upon the transaction. But the picture was brought back by the bearer, with a verbal message to the effect that Mr. Patringham and his family had left Florence a fortnight ago, and a slip of paper, on which was written—

"Signor Tanari declines to concern himself with this or any other work of Signor Filippo Lonari."

This was disagreeable enough. It was not that the little picture seemed to be thrown on his hands; nor even that the refusal of the most accredited picture-dealer in Florence to have any dealings with him was likely to affect perniciously his future career

as an artist. He flattered himself that he should be in a position to care very little about any small addition to his means that might be derivable from such sources. But it was painful to feel himself thus outlawed, as it were, by the members of his craft. He could not doubt that Signor Tanari spoke only the general sentiment of the members of the profession towards him. Indeed, they had most of them found means in one way or another to show him the cold shoulder. It would not do to repeat to himself that his friendships would henceforward be formed in quite a different sphere and circle of society; and that his position would shortly be one which the most prosperous of his quondam comrades, or even Signor Tanari himself, might, and would, envy. The world to whose opinions and judgments a man feels himself compelled to owe homage and allegiance, is the world in which he has lived his past, rather than that in which he hopes

to live his future life. And struggle against it as he would, Pippo could not help feeling severely the very vigorous slap on the face which had been administered to him by the influential picture-dealer.

It was not long after this incident, that another occurred, which still more strongly,—though, as it seemed to himself, far more unreasonably and absurdly,—disturbed the happiness of these months of triumph.

It was the morning of the festival of the Ascension, and about the middle of May. Now on that day, according to immemorial custom, "all Florence" goes forth to the beautiful woods and lawns of the "Caseine," just outside the city gate, there to spend a happy day in pic-nic festivities;—all that part of Florence, that is to say, which is not too fine to share in popular amusement, or too poor to afford the means of even the most frugal banquet,—or, lastly, too heart-dry and

world-worn to be capable of any amusement at all.

Old Laudadio Benincasa would probably have fallen into this latter category if Beppina had not very vigorously insisted on his accompanying her and Aunt Assunta to the Cascine on this occasion. Uncle Marradi also had promised to be in Florence for the festival. It would be so delightful! It was all settled, and he must go. Pippo was of course of the party. *Ça va sans mot dire.* It did not occur to Beppina, when urging her father to consent, and marvelling at his insensibility to the delights of the excursion, that *he* would have no lover there to make every moment exquisite. But failing that, he insisted that he would have an arm-chair carried out for his use. They might squat on the ground like dogs and cats, if they liked, but he, Laudadio, had no notion of exhibiting himself to the world under any such undignified circumstances. So it was settled that his own

arm-chair should go in the cart that was to carry the *vivres;* and on this condition the old man consented to undertake the unwonted labour of a day's pleasuring.

But in truth to anyone with an eye for the picturesque and the beautiful, and a temper ready to share in the enjoyment of a whole population of happy holiday-makers, an Ascension-day visit to the Cascine does not absolutely need one's twentieth year, and the presence of an affianced lover, to make it very pleasant. It is difficult to imagine a lovelier spot for holiday-making of the kind. There are sunny meadows and shady copses, violet-grown banks and marble benches, crowded promenades and sequestered sylvan alleys; and the whole is shut in and backed by the range of the lower Apennines, glowing with such purple bloom in the sunlight, as might make the discoverer of the Solferino-dye despair, and dotted all over with those innumerable villas which made

the poet declare that if they were gathered within a wall, they would make Florence equal to two Romes. Add to the permanent beauty of the spot, the varied and picturesque groups of intensely merry but always perfectly sober revellers of all ages, both sexes, and various classes, and it is easy to understand that the scene must be a more than ordinarily attractive one.

Many parties leave the city at break of day to begin their holiday with a breakfast *al fresco.* But our friends from the *cereria* had settled to start at noon; and Pippo was to join them there a little before that time. He had just completed a careful toilette, and was on the point of starting for the *cereria,* when a letter was given to him by a boy who said he had been told to deliver it into his own hands. The address was written in a hand quite new to him. He opened the paper hurriedly and with some irritation at being thus delayed at the moment of setting

forth to keep his appointment, and read as follows:—

"My own Beloved!

"They tell me that I ought not to address you with such words, that you no longer care for me, and that I ought similarly to think no more of you. But this does not seem right to my mind; and even if it did seem right, it is impossible to me. In the first place I am not sure, Pippo, that you have no love for me any more; for it may be that it is necessary for you, for many reasons which I cannot understand, to leave me. But even if I were sure of it I could not address you otherwise than I have written at the beginning of this letter. For whether you love me or not I cannot help loving you the same as ever. I cannot; and I have no wish to do so. For though I have prayed very much for some things, I have never prayed that my love should

cease. But I have prayed that I might be taken out of this world, which seems to me so wearisome and dreary. I have prayed for this, and I am sure that the blessed Virgin has heard my prayer, and that it will soon be granted. And I write now, therefore, to remind you of your promise that you would let me see you once more before I die; and to tell you that the time is come for fulfilling it. I am going to die. But you must not suppose, my dear love, that you have caused my death by leaving me. When the people here have told me so, I have answered how wrong it is to say so. For I have prayed to die; and my death, therefore, is my own doing. And when I have seen you once again I think that I can die content. If you can tell me, Pippo, when you come, that you do still love your poor Tina, and that we are parted only by necessities, which I do not understand, and not because you have ceased to care for me, then

I am sure I shall die happy. But I know that you will not tell me so if it is not true. And see now, Pippo dear, you must come to the address written below. Things have been going ill with us,—La Sappi and me;—and we have been forced to leave the old rooms in the Corso and come here. We could not earn enough to pay the rent; and so we came to live here, in the same house with La Sappi's sister, where the rent is much less. They are very good to me,—La Sappi and her sister, and brother-in-law, and let me want for nothing.

"Come quick, Pippo, my own love! I know that I shall see you again before I die.

"Always your own TINA."

All this was written in a clear and clerkly hand, very unlike anything which poor little Tina could have accomplished. For the professional letter-writer, whom we read of as such a prominent personage in the East, is

still extant in Italy; and the people have recourse to his services without any repugnance, in matters which the more reserved natures of our own countrymen, of whatsoever class, would hardly like to confide to a third person.

At the foot of the letter was written very legibly the address to which he was to go. But Pippo never looked at it. By the time he had read to the end of the letter he was quite angry with the writer. The few words which spoke of the change of residence and its cause did occasion him a twinge of conscience. But he readily made it all right with himself by determining that he would behave very liberally to the poor girl as soon as he should be master of Beppina's fortune. As for the rest, it really was too bad, this persistence in hunting him down and claiming him, when she must have perceived clearly enough that all was necessarily over between them. And then all that stuff and

nonsense about dying! As if people knew when they were going to die! And as if all girls in the same circumstances did not say the same thing! He flattered himself he was far too old a bird to be caught by such chaff as that! And as for his going to hunt through the town for her just at that time in the present position of his affairs,—that was a very likely thing! A pretty business it might be if his enemies should be able to make it appear to old Laudadio that he was still secretly keeping up his connection with her! She changes her residence, and he, evidently well acquainted with all her movements, forthwith visits her in her new abode! Why such a step, if known, as two to one it would be, might ruin everything. Known! why was it not likely enough that she would take very good care that it *should* be known? And was it not very possible that this visit was so strongly urged with the express view of making it the means of throwing difficul-

ties in the way of his marriage, and perhaps breaking it off altogether? No! no! If they were to meet again it should at least be after all had been made safe with Beppina.

It is strange how men will strive to impose on themselves by falsehoods exactly similar to those they would make use of for the sake of deceiving others;—how they will say to themselves in their own solitary meditations things which their own hearts know to be untrue at the moment the mind coins them, with the expectation that in some way or other they will before some tribunal or other justify acts which the will has determined on, but which the conscience condemns. Pippo knew in his very inmost heart that no such thought as that which he had attributed to her had ever passed through Tina's mind,—knew it as certainly as if he could have read her heart far more clearly than he could read his own. Nevertheless

he felt as if he was somehow justifying himself by pretending to himself to believe the unworthy suspicion which his mind had suggested.

But some men have the gift of duping their consciences more completely than others. And in this case at least Pippo's sophistry was but very imperfectly successful. He remained, despite all he could say to himself, uneasy on the subject. He could not get rid of the image of that wan, shrunken figure, with the solemn, melancholy, far-off-looking eyes, which gazed at him as he stood about to leave her in the room in the Corso; and as the haunting remembrance pursued him, his uneasiness took almost the hue of fear. What did she mean by that last sentence in her letter, "I know that I shall see you again before I die?" If she were so near death how could she know any such thing? At all events he was not going to seek her out in the new

lodging to which she had chosen to take herself—he could tell her that—at least not till after his marriage. Then, perhaps, he might see about it; and if she seemed disposed to behave reasonably, and not give him further annoyance, why he should be willing on his part to act liberally towards her. But as for dying and seeing him on her death-bed! . . Bah! he had no patience with such trash!

So Tina's letter was thrown aside; and he prepared to join his friends at the *cereria*, to go with them on their day's pleasuring to the Cascine.

And the sun shone brightly, and the birds in the woods were singing, and Beppina was in high glee; and the cold roast quarter of lamb and salad was excellent; and the champagne was first-rate—for Signor Laudadio was determined if he did dissipate to dissipate splendidly; though for his own part he preferred a good flask of Chianti to all the champagne in France—and the old

folks took their siesta after their repast, as old folks should, both for their own and others' comfort and convenience; and a more delightful opportunity for making love was never offered, if only a man had any love in his heart to make, instead of having a skeleton shut up in the cupboard of it.

Now, though Pippo was not insensible to the fact, that Beppina Benincasa was in truth a very pretty and attractive little personage, yet his *love* was for the wax-chandling savings and profits attached to her; and he "made it" appropriately, rather to her father than to herself, by such delicate attentions as enrolling himself among the brethren of the Misericordia, and other evidences of "right-thinking" tendencies. And then, on the other hand, the remembrance of La Beata's look, and of her letter, played the part of a skeleton quite sufficiently developed to destroy any pleasure he might have found in the little festival, had he been in a more

joyous state of mind. As it was, poor little Beppina could not help finding him a provokingly dull and backward lover; and the day which had been destined with so much premeditation to especial enjoyment was felt, at least by her, to have turned out a failure.

But even holidays come to an end; and when on parting at the door of the *cereria*, to which Pippo had escorted his *fiancée*, she whispered, "Come to-morrow evening; and do come in better humour, *Caro*, than you have been to-day," he was fain to plead the standing excuse of a bad headache.

"I tried hard to conceal it from you, dearest," he said, "but it is difficult to deceive the observation of loving eyes. I shall be better, I have no doubt, to-morrow."

So kind-hearted little Beppina said to herself as she undressed: "Poor dear Pippo! what a shame of me to think that he was cross, and he suffering, and trying to

hide it all the time. I must make it up to him, dear fellow, to-morrow night."

And Pippo, as he went to bed, after smoking a solitary cigar at an unfrequented café, where he was sure of meeting nobody who knew him, said to himself—

"She saw that I was out of sorts plain enough! And all about that confounded letter! I have not been able to get it out of my head all day. But it will never do to go on so! It is all a parcel of trash and humbug; and I shall not give it another thought."

So he went to sleep, and dreamed that he was called away from the altar, as he was being married, to the death-bed of La Beata, who laughed, as he looked down on her death-stricken face, and repeated, "I knew that I should see you again before I died."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE CALL OF THE BELL.

Pippo was no further tormented by any tidings from La Beata, and gradually got rid of the impression her letter had made on his mind, despite his efforts to escape from it. And the time went on, and spring grew into summer, and the great day—great to all Florence as the highest holiday of the year, but to Pippo as the goal of all his hopes and ambitions—the great day of St. Giovanni drew near.

The eve of the festival is, perhaps, even greater than the saint's day itself. On the latter take place the ecclesiastical celebrations; but on the former are performed those marvellously travestied mediæval chariot

races, and the truly superb and beautiful illuminations and fireworks. Of course Pippo accompanied Beppina and her aunt to the Piazza of Santa Maria Novella to see the races, and to see the grand duke and his family and household seeing them. For it was an essential part of the duty of that paternal sovereign towards his people that he should be present annually on this occasion. The Piazza is encircled, for the festa, with four or five ranges of seats, rising in amphitheatre fashion one above the other, and these were closely packed for a long time before the commencement of the sport by a multitude, contented to wait with the utmost good humour an hour for an entertainment of some ten minutes' duration. But the interval could be agreeably occupied by chat, and when did a Tuscan ever find too long an hour so employed? When at length the Piazza was cleared, the dense crowd which filled it disappearing by some mys

terious process before a line of mounted gendarmes, like an ebbing tide the well-remembered old chariots entered, with their sorry steeds and togaed post-boys; and the people cheered and made their bets on one or the other of the five equipages, quite as satisfactorily as if those pacific and unambitious functionaries had not previously settled, by private arrangement among themselves, which was to be the victor in these more or less Olympic games.

And then the unwieldy machines performed their cow-like gallop, one at the tail of the other, thrice round the Piazza; the dust flew, the people shouted, and the show was over.

In the evening the lovers were again together; and this time Signor Laudadio was of the party. The Italians are generally great in fireworks, and on the occasion in question all the resources of the art are put in requisition. They take place always

on the Carraia bridge, facing upwards towards the other bridges; and may therefore be seen to advantage either from any of the windows, balconies, or housetops of the houses on the Lungarno, or from the street itself on either side the river, or from ei her of the upper bridges. The selecter portion of the Florentines of course occupy, for the most part, the former, and the nobility the latter of these positions. But there is a third mode of seeing the fireworks, more enjoyable than either of these, which has also the advantage of rendering those who adopt it a very picturesque part of the general scene. This is to hire a boat, deck it gaily with awnings and coloured lamps, add perhaps a bugle and cornet-a-piston or two, and so, flitting about far down between the high quays, and momentarily lighting up the darkness of the gulf between them, look up from the surface of the dark water at the brilliancy above, unannoyed by the throng of the streets or the heat of crowded rooms.

It was this latter plan that the party from the *cereria* adopted on the occasion in question. It was a great and extraordinary luxury and expense for the old wax-chandler to indulge in; although he might very well have hired a boat every night in the year, if he had wished it, without being guilty of any financial imprudence. But old Laudadio walked in the frugal and thrifty ways of his Florentine trading forefathers, and eschewed unnecessary, and above all unusual expenses.

On the present great occasion, however, Beppina had with little difficulty persuaded her father to grant her this indulgence. The party consisted of the three old folks—Signor Marradi, Aunt Assunta, and Laudadio himself—and the young couple, Pippo and Beppina. A prettier scene, or a more admirable opportunity for that love talk by tongue, eye, and hand, which should mark the eve of a bridal day with a stone so white as to shine out ever visible to memory through the long track of dim after-years,

can hardly be imagined. And it is provoking to think that it should have been thrown away on a lover so little worthy of it. Pippo was more expansive, indeed, than he had been on that Ascension-day, in the Cascine, now more than a month ago; for nothing had occurred to ruffle him or damp the exulting triumph with which he looked forward to the consummation of all his hopes on the morrow. He *did* sit with her hand in his, and he did talk to her during most of the evening in tones meant for her ear alone. But the topics of his talk were of a more practical and prosaic nature than that which poor little Beppina would have liked to hear —plans for the furnishing of the first floor over the *cereria*, as soon as the banking firm, who rented it, should be turned out; discussions as to the chamber best adapted for a painting-room; speculations as to the value of the business, &c., &c., instead of . . . . Beppina would have been quite at a loss to

explain exactly what it was, which she would have preferred to hear rather than all this. But she felt that there *was* a kind of talk which would have been more to the purpose, quite as sensibly as might the most completely poesy-fed damsel under similar circumstances. Beppina, however, was not the girl to let any such falling off from the perfection of her beau-idéal make her unhappy. Pippo looked exceedingly handsome; and one cannot have everything!

When the fireworks were over, they left their boat to take a stroll through the city, and enjoy the fairy-land beauty of the illuminations. There is no city in the world which repays the cost of illuminating it so abundantly as fair Florence. There is something in the forms or in the colouring of the marble and stone of her churches and palaces, and "loggie," and statues, or in the quality of the atmosphere, or perhaps even in that of the pure olive-oil used for the

purpose, which produces a beauty magical beyond that of other places on like occasions. The moral atmosphere, also, of Florence, is not a little favourable to the enjoyment of such festivities. Everybody is in good humour, everybody is courteous, everybody is patient and forbearing. Nobody quarrels, nobody pushes, nobody fights, nobody picks pockets, nobody gets drunk. So that an hour's lounge among the piazzas and loggias of Florence, on a gala night at midsummer, stopping to hear, under the shadow of a grand old palace, here a strain of Bellini, and there again, in the full blaze of an open piazza, a brilliant morsel of Verdi, admirably executed by the bands stationed at different points, is as pleasant a pastime as one often meets with.

It was nearly eleven o'clock before the party returned from their stroll through the city to the *cereria*. As they entered the nest of little quiet streets in the midst of

which it was situated, the lights, the hum of voices and laughter, and the music died away behind them, and the grim old palace belonging to the wax-chandler stood silent in its retirement, as if scorning to countenance the degenerate revelries of these latter days.

Old Laudadio had returned home before the rest of the party, having, very soon after leaving the boat, become tired of walking about, and saying that he would go and superintend the preparations for the supper in the garden behind the *cereria*, which was to conclude the day's festivities.

It was a pleasant spot that little garden in the heart of the city;—more so than the inhabitants of coal-consuming cities would be likely to imagine, judging from their own experience of city gardens. The southern wall was covered thickly by the dark-green foliage of three or four very old orange-trees of the bitter orange kind. It is a more

hardy plant than the other, which will not live in the open air through a Florence winter. The other walls were hung with a luxuriant growth of Virginian creeper and Banksian rose. Then a number of beds raised a little within cut stone enclosures, and filled with the rich, brown soil gathered under the chestnut forests of the Vallombrosa mountains, which consists entirely of decayed chestnut-wood and leaves, were all a-bloom with camellias, rhododendrons, and azaleas. The peculiar soil above mentioned, which the bog-earth used by English gardeners for the same purpose replaces in our gardens less advantageously, admirably suits all that class of plants, and contributes much to earn for Florence its title of the City of Flowers. In the two corners nearest the house, immediately in front of the wide flagged terrace on which the windows opened, were two large plants of *Olea fragrans*, which perfumed the whole place. At

the further end,—one on either side of an old fountain in shell-work, long since waterless,—were two very lofty and admirably tapering cypress-trees; between which, framed in by their black-green spires, was seen the towering cupola of the cathedral—always a striking feature in the little landscape of Signor Laudadio's garden; but on the night in question all a-blaze with lamps from the drum to the cross, the powerful glare of which threw a strange and theatre-like light on the cypresses and between them athwart the garden below. It fell strongly on a large, oval basin of white marble, which formed the centre piece of the little garden, and on a pair of statues of the same material, which stood at the sides of the centre window of the terrace, against a background formed on either side of the window by huge, tall plants of crimson-flowered geranium. One thing an English eye would have missed in this little Floren-

tine paradise,—a flooring of soft, green turf. This is unattainable in any perfection in Tuscany; and Tuscan gardeners wisely do not attempt it. All the space unoccupied by the objects which have been described was gravel diversified by groups of flowering plants in pots of all sizes, from such as are ordinarily seen in our gardens to huge terra-cotta vases three or four feet high, and of proportional diameter.

The eye unaccustomed to Italian gardens at first finds it difficult to pardon the entire absence of our own beautiful green sward; but the most passionate lover of greenery would hardly have failed to admit that the little city garden behind the *cereria* was a very charming spot.

Especially he would have been disposed to find it such had he entered it after some four hours of sight-seeing and rambling, and found, as was the case on the night in question, a table spread with very appetizing-

looking preparations for supper on the flag-stone terrace in front of the sitting-room windows.

Old Laudadio came limping along the terrace from the further end of it as the sight-seers entered through the window, bearing in either hand a dusty flask of right Montepulciano, each holding a good three bottles, such as bottles are in these days;—Montepulciano,—Redi's "king of all wines,"—grown before the hateful vine-disease was dreamed of: wine which a genuine Tuscan still considers such; and which any one whose tongue is not too delicate to pardon a little roughness, and who likes his juice of the grape unmixed, undoctored, unbrandied, yet of generous quality and full flavour, may well prefer to many a vaunted growth of France. Having carefully wiped these delicately fragile glass bulbs, the old man proceeded knowingly to *uncork* them—if the metaphor may be used—by jerking out with

a twist of the wrist the small quantity of olive-oil. which, reposing on the top of the wine in the slender neck of the flask, closes it more hermetically than any cork could do, and placed one at either end of the table.

Signor Laudadio sat at one end, and *Fattore* Marradi, his brother-in-law, opposite to him. Beppino and Pippo sat on the side next the house, facing the cypress-trees and the illuminated dome beyond them, and Aunt Assunta opposite to them. And whatever may have been the case as to the previous amusement of the day, the supper was thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed by all of them. For supping is an amusement adapted, when not spoiled by dinner, to all capacities and all ages. And as the good wine did its office talk flowed apace; and even Pippo was warmed into playing his part with a somewhat more successful imitation of those duties of his position,

which poor little Beppina had sighed for as they sat together in the boat.

When they had finished supper the two seniors drew together at one end of the table with a flask between them, and lighted their cigars, while the young ones went to the piano, which stood just inside the open window; and Aunt Assunta betook herself to the sofa, where she soon fell, as well she might, fast asleep.

"Now, *Signore mio*," said Beppina, as she placed herself at the piano, "what will you have? Shall it be '*Casta Diva*,' or one of the *Stornelli* Aunt Assunta is so fond of?"

"I can't say I think '*Casta Diva*' would be in keeping with the glare of lamplight streaming down into the garden there," said Pippo.

"And besides," added Beppina, with a mock sigh, "it would be easier to find in the *Stornelli* something adapted to my own position. For instance,

'Flower of the rue
A jealous doubt weighs on my heart like lead;
Come death to cure me, if my love's not true.'

Must the flower of the rue be my flower, eh, *caro mio?*" she added.

"Nay!" said he; "we'll have no such flower in our garden either now or ever, Beppina *mia*. I think, if it must needs be something *de circonstance*, that you might find a song to suit our case better than that."

"Is this more like it then, '*Lustrissimo Signore mio?*" she returned, looking up into his face with a gaze half tender, half arch, as she sang again:—

"Flower of the pine!
A dreamer seeks his number on the page*
As I my answer in those looks of thine."

"Not a bit of it, *amor mio!*" replied he; "you must try again; the answer you profess to look for has been given so often that I

* An allusion to the dream-books popular in Tuscany, which profess to expound the hidden signification of all dreams.

do not believe a word of any anxiety about the oracle. Try again."

"Well then! here is one that I vow would have fitted you well enough as you sat in the boat just now, Pippo *mio*," said she, pretending to pout.

"Flower of the may!
The swallows talk of love beneath your eaves,
Yet, hard of heart, you heed not what they say."

"There was I, like one of those same swallows chattering away all my little endearments; but you had not a word to say, or else nothing but talk about houses, and doors, and windows, and such-like stupid matters!"

"Why! *cara mia*, I thought they were matters that interested you as much as me. Such things have to be talked about some time or other, have they not?" returned he, stupidly taking her laughing reproach much more seriously than she had dreamed of meaning it.

"Yes, I suppose so," she replied; "at some time, but not just such a time. Here is another :—

'Flower of the balm!
The nightingale sings loud, the fireflies glow;
But thou liest sleeping, for thy heart is calm.'

Or suppose we were to rhyme it this way," she continued, three parts jestingly, with just a point of pique :—

"'Flower of the marigold!
The nightingale sings loud, the fireflies glow;
But thou sitt'st silent, for thy heart is cold.'

"Is that the right reading, Pippo *mio*, eh?"

"Now, Beppina, that is too bad! You know well, how far it is from being the right reading. Cold, indeed! Ah! *anima mia.* I think you know better than that! I don't like your collection of *Stornelli* at all."

"Well then, shall we try some *Rispetti?** What do you say to this now?

* Another form of popular rhyme and song so called by the people, probably from being intended to convey the homage, "respect" of a lover to the object of his passion.

'Dear heart I strive to write thy name;
I strive, but all in vain;
The pen is blunt with sadness,
The ink is clogged with pain.
Bitter, bitter ink, I wot,
Death will come, if thou do not.'

That of course you will understand to represent my state of mind, all those years that you never came near us, you naughty Pippo! Is my *Rispetto* more to your liking, sir?"

"Truly, Beppina *mia*, it is somewhat more to the purpose," said Pippo, thinking it necessary to repair his short-comings in the boat by a daring draft on the resources of fiction; "for if you only suppose the persons changed, the rhyme tells in simple truth what I have felt, oh! how often, during those dark, dreary years. Ah! Beppina, you don't know yet how miserable that time was! And have you never guessed *all* the reasons that made my destination to the Church intolerable to me?"

It is curious how naturally and readily a lie grows and amplifies itself. When Pippo began to speak, he had not thought of this last admirably improvised bit of delicate flattery.

"But still, my own!" added he, "you have failed to find anything befitting our happiness this night; for, thank God! your last describes what is past and gone for ever."

"For ever, *caro mio?*" said Beppina, greatly delighted, poor, simple, little soul! with the prize her last cast of the net had brought her in, and bent on trying again. "For ever is a long word, Pippo *mio;* and if that one applies only to the past, perhaps this may describe the future;" and she sang, beginning with mock pathos, which changed to real sentiment as the spirit of the strain took hold of her mind:—

'Once thou wast only mine
Fair love! sweet love!
But now another holds that heart of thine,
Oh! faithless love!

Hast thou forgotten quite the pleasant time
Of love's dear prime?
Oh, blessed days with all your joy and pain,
Can ye not come again?
Never more, back again!"

"Why, Beppina! *anima mia!*" cried Pippo; "I do think that you have the mournfullest and most uncomfortable set of ditties that ever filled the head of a willow-wearing damsel!—you of all the girls in the world the sunniest-hearted, happiest, brightest creature that ever made sunshine in a man's heart by smiling on him. Come now! do sing something a little less melancholy. Trust me, my own precious sunbeam, laughing and not crying is your proper element."

"You are hard to please to night, *Signore mio*," said Beppina, with a profound mock sigh; "but one must strive to content you, I suppose."

"Here's a very pretty ditty; and you may take the warning to yourself, 'gnor Pippo. That time that you say was so miserable,—

if all tales are true you were not thinking of poor Beppina the whole time. Perhaps your sighing is not *all* for her now. What do you say to this?—

> ‘ Beware of red lips that deceive thee
> With honey-sweet tone,
> And vow to love ever; then leave thee
> Poor victim! alone.
> 'Tis dull work sighing
> For sands that are run;—
> Sighing and dying
> Like meadow-grass drying
> Away in the sun.
> For the grass it fades, be it never so fair;
> Beware!'

Ah, yes! *poor victim!* I'll have no sighing for sands that are run! Eh, Pippo?"

There was something in the idea suggested of dying like the grass of the field, dried up by the sun, for the sake of "sands that are run," that produced a painful image in Pippo's mind, shaping itself there to an application exactly the reverse of that intended by the song. He did not like the chance, which had led Beppina so vaguely and innocently

to touch a chord that vibrated so disagreeably in his memory.

"Bah!" he cried; "who dies now-a-days for thinking on sands that are run! But you are not just to me, Beppina. Let by-gones be by-gones. As for me, I am sure I am the last man in the world to wish to look back from a happy present to a miserable past. If we must be troubling ourselves with old accounts, that are settled and done with, I dare say your biography during those years would not be all a blank."

Beppina, who had been chattering her nonsense in mere wantonness, as her scraps of old songs suggested to her, without the slightest meaning or intention of any sort, beyond getting a laugh out of them at worst, and at best provoking some little tender demonstration from her lover, could not understand his half-in-earnest crossness. Strong, however, in her own happy good humour, and not choosing, if other loves *were* to be

alluded to, to plead guilty to a too disconsolate wearing of the willow during the period of Pippo's separation from her, she replied to his last insinuation by saying:

"Oh! *my* biography, *Eccellenza!* If you want a rhyme to sum up that, here is one for you:—

'Mother! I'm weary of waiting!'

Ah, my poor mother, Heaven rest her blessed soul! died long before I was old enough to have any recollection of her. But that makes no difference in the song. In my case it was 'Aunt;' that's all the difference, —Aunt Assunta, you know. The song goes this way:—

'Mother! I'm weary of waiting
I've made up my mind!
Three suitors are dying to have me!
Now, pray be so kind
As to choose me the best of the three;
Come, mother, and see,
Which shall it be?
Which of the three?

Daughter! pray who are your sweethearts?
The horse-doctor's one,
Then the fat druggist; and lastly
The notary's son.'

But I was destined to a different fate, it seems. My young hopes were crushed in the bud. For this is what Aunt Assunta answered:—

'Daughter, they're rogues all three!
The horse-doctor's one;
The druggist is worse than he;
Worst of all is the notary's son!
Daughter, be guided by me;
These rogues all three
Are but laughing at thee!'

So you see, Pippo, my loves came to nothing. Three disappointments, all in one bunch, was hard for a poor girl to bear, wasn't it? You saw what a skeleton the pining over my sorrows had reduced me to, when you deigned to come back to us. I hope I shan't have a fourth, eh, Pippo?"

"Which would affect you quite as profoundly as those others you sing of did, eh, *Beppina mia?*" said Pippo, recovering the

tone of good humour, which the unlucky allusion of Beppina's previous song had made him lose for a moment. "No, my own love!" he continued, dreadfully tired of his evening's love-making, and stifling a yawn; "no; please heaven, a few more hours will put us both beyond the reach of disappointments."

"A few hours, indeed; it must be shockingly late; and I vow, Pippo, you are yawning!" pouted Beppina; "and I never was less sleepy in my life. But just hear this pretty song before you go. It is a favourite of mine. Listen to it, sir, and feel ashamed of yourself:—

'A dazzling mist comes o'er my sight,
A yawning, weary, drowsy weight!
Why are these idlers here to night?
And why, oh why comes *He* so late?
If that bright face were smiling by me
No sleep, I'll swear, would e'er come nigh me!
Could I but see that pleasant face
Little I'd feel of drowsiness.

'The old clerk hobbled in just now
And straight the cards began to shuffle
While he and mother whispered low;
Lord! how I yawned to hear him snuffle!

But if that face were smiling by me
No sleep, I'll swear, would e'er come nigh me!
Could I but see that pleasant face,
There'd be no yawning in the case.'

But as that is not the case with you, I'll send you home to bed now. But you wanted a merry song? Well, you shall have one for the last, before you go. Yes! as you say, I'm more given to laughing than crying. And this is the tune I like to laugh to: I trust it may please your Excellency.

"'If thou hast left me
Heartsore; what then?
If damsels be plenty,
There's no lack of men!
And though there were none—
When all's said and done
Are they worth such a coil made about them?
No, no!
Let them go!
Believe me, I *can* do without them!
Oh yes, sir! we can do without them!'"

Just as Beppina was rattling off the above saucy *refrain*, and ending it in a merry laugh, which seemed fully to justify Pippo's declaration that laughing rather than weep-

ing was her *forte*, they were interrupted by the sudden solitary stroke of a very powerful bell, which sounded as if it were close over their heads.

"The Misericordia bell!" cried Beppina, suddenly ceasing from her laugh, and rapidly crossing herself, as the sound so well known to every Florentine died away after booming out one heavy stroke. "Oh! this night too, of all nights in the year! One toll of the bell! It is some sick person. But it must be a case of great urgency to send for the Misericordia to a sick person at this hour. Why, I declare it is near one o'clock!"

"The worst is that it is my week of service," said Pippo. "I must go. Good night! Good-by for a few hours,—only a few hours, my own love. Ah! you won't sing that last song of yours to-morrow."

"Perhaps no, perhaps yes; who knows?" laughed Beppina, as she allowed him to take

a kiss on her cheek. "Good night; God bless thee, my dear love!"

Old Laudadio and Signor Marradi had been startled out of their chat by the bell which, flinging its ominous summons very audibly over the entire city, was startlingly loud at the very short distance which separated Laudadio's garden from the Duomo. They both came in through the window, as Pippo was saying his good night.

"I wonder what it can be at this time of night!" said Signor Laudadio.

"I can tell you to-morrow, sir," answered Pippo, "for I am on service, and must run off. Good night! Good night! *A rivederla dimani mattina!*"

And so saying he hurried off to the neighbouring oratory of the brotherhood to do his work of mercy, whatever it might be.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE MISERICORDIA.

The city, which an hour previously had been so full of light and life and bustle and music, was as profoundly quiet as on ordinary occasions, when Pippo hastened into the *Piazza del Duomo*, and presented himself at the oratory of the Misericordia; for Florence is orderly even in her rejoicing and merriment. Soon after midnight the fun is over, the lamps die out, and the revellers, one and all, go quietly home to their beds.

The night was not dark; for though the moon had fortunately not risen early enough to injure the effect of the illuminations, she was now sailing aloft through the pure

purple of the cloudless summer sky; and the towers and domes, so lately flaunting in the garish bravery of their holiday trim, were looking pale, melancholy, and repentant in the ghostly white light.

It was but a step from the little street in which the *cereria* was situated to the *Piazza del Duomo*, and Pippo was among the two or three first to arrive in obedience to the summons. They had to wait some little time before a sufficient number were assembled for the duty in hand—the removal to the hospital of a sick woman, who, it was feared, would not last out till morning, her malady having, it was stated, suddenly assumed an alarming character. The dwelling to which the Brethren had been summoned was in one of the most distant parts of the town, near the St. Nicholas Gate.

It was not very long before a sufficient number of the Brethren had assembled. But the attendance on that festival night

was perhaps somewhat more slack than ordinary; and it so happened that no member of superior rank to that of Pippo in the hierarchy of the Order was among those who answered the call. It became necessary, therefore, that he should act as Captain of the party about to start for the Porta di San Niccolo.

It is the duty of the Captain on these occasions to walk at the head of the procession; to direct all its operations; to exercise his discretion in leaving with the friends and relatives of the sick person to be removed, a small alms on behalf of the brotherhood, if such assistance shall appear to him to be needed; and to superintend the changes of the bearers who carry the litter. It is also his duty to take care that there shall be in due readiness, in case of need, all the apparatus required for the last hurried shrift of a person *in extremis*—the crucifix, the candle, the breviary, the holy

oil, &c. All these tools for the due passing of a soul, according to the forms of the Romish faith, are deposited in a little box attached to the under part of the litter in front. One at least of the procession engaged on the errand of mercy is a priest, and he is ready to do his function in case of need. Furthermore, it is the duty of the Captain to see that the regulations of the brotherhood are strictly observed in regard to the dress and bearing of the party under his direction, and more especially in respect to their communications with the house to which their duty takes them. Their rule requires that a glass of cold water should be the utmost refreshment of any kind which any member may accept in the house or from the inmates of it; and still less, of course, may any other reward or remuneration be received. From persons in easy circumstances, indeed, when, as not unfrequently occurs, the services of the Miseri-

cordia are requested to remove an invalid, a remuneration is expected. But this must be made to the proper treasurer of the funds of the charity. The Brethren on service are prohibited from touching more than a glass of water, as much in a palace as in a hovel.

Fourteen of the Brethren had assembled, and one by one, as he arrived, had passed into the robing-room, and come out from it into the chapel enveloped in the long black gown reaching to the feet, and the peaked hood over the head, entirely concealing every feature save the eyes, which might be seen strangely gleaming through the holes cut for them in the cowl. Every man also had an immensely large broad-leafed hat hanging from his neck at the back of his shoulders. Thus enveloped and disguised, so as not to be recognizable by the most intimate friend, the band issued from the chapel after a short interval of devotion; and six of them, silently pairing themselves

with reference to similarity of stature, raised to their shoulders one of the black covered litters belonging to the brotherhood, while the Captain, having looked to the shriving apparatus in the receptacle which has been described, placed himself at their head, and the rest disposed themselves two and two behind the litter. And in this order, and in total silence, they started on their mission with that steady and uniform, but by no means slow step, which practice has made peculiar to the members of the Misericordia.

Of all the sights peculiar to the street life of Florence, there is perhaps none which strikes a stranger more forcibly than the passage of one of these convoys of the Brotherhood of Mercy. The whole thing is a bit of the life of the middle ages, cut out bodily from its original surroundings and transported into our own so wholly dissimilar times. The idea on which the institution reposes, the mode in which it is carried out,

and the material and visible presentation of it, as seen in operation, are all strictly and essentially mediæval. Mercy and its works are, God be thanked! the monopoly of no age nor church, nor clime. It may, indeed, be permitted to us to hope, that the genuine feeling of the good Samaritan, consideration on the part of the strong and prosperous for their weaker and less fortunate brethren, and recognition of the duty of helpfulness, was at no period of the world's history more general than in our own. But we do our "works of mercy" in a different way, if not in a different spirit. The principle of the division of labour, increased activity, and schemes for the economizing of time consequent upon this, have had their influence on our benevolence and our charity, as on every other department of social life. And like every other human product or arrangement these tendencies are not wholly beneficial. Instead of leaving our occupations or our

families to don a black disguisement, and put our own hands to the work of mercy, we pay our quarterly subscriptions to a hospital; and an immeasurably greater amount of good accomplished by a similar quantum of self-sacrifice is the result. Works of mercy, no less than all other works, can be most efficiently and beneficially done by professional heads and hands specially trained to the purpose. The recipients of the mercy, it may safely be concluded, are entirely and largely benefited by the change in the modern practice. But the advantage of the other party—the doers of mercy—remains to be considered. It may be open to a doubt—the admirers of the "ages of faith" would say that it admits of none—whether the good Samaritan would have been equally benefited in his own moral nature, if, instead of personally tending the waylaid stranger, he had simply paid his surgeon's bill, without ever seeing him.

But it must be remembered that this mode of looking at the matter does not include a view of all the circumstances of the case in question. There was a melo-dramatic element in those old world manifestations of sentiment, which did not take its rise from an altogether pure source, and did not fail in some degree to affect injuriously both those good works and the workers of them, to which it attached itself. To this has to be added the important difference between spontaneous self-originating compassion for an individual case, and mere membership, however voluntary and conscientiously assumed, of an established institution. And putting aside, as belonging to a much larger question, the radical and fatal taint inherent in a system of conduct based on the theory of a quid-pro-quo purchase of so much available merit for so much "work of mercy," as per account;—there remains to be taken into consideration the inevitable tendency of such institutions

as that in question to degenerate into routine, officialism, and formalism.

The old Florentine Misericordia, in the absence of more modern and more efficient means for performing the same services, does unquestionably a great amount of good. It is an overt and standing recognition of the worth, duty, and excellence of merciful helpfulness. The black gown and hood are a very striking and loud enforcement of the golden rule, not to let the one hand know what the other is doing,—not to be "seen of men." *But . . . . .* it is a very respectable thing in Florence to belong to the Misericordia.

At all events, whatever else it may be or may not be, the Misericordia is an exceedingly *picturesque* institution. Nothing indeed can, merely in itself, if robbed of all its associations, be more unpleasing to the outward eye than one of those black, ominous-looking litters attended by its cortège of black-masked figures in their hideous peaked

cowls. But, looked at sympathizingly, with all the associations, local and historical, belonging to it, one of those strange processions, seen in its due setting of antique streets and storied walls, defiling from the *Via della Morta** in the immediate neighbourhood of the brotherhood's oratory, or passing with its solemnly-swinging tramp across the piazza under the shadow of the tower of the old republic, has a singular power of transporting the imagination back to the days when such sights and institutions were a homogeneous part and parcel of the social life around them.

Especially is one of the Misericordia processions a striking object when encountered by a belated straggler returning from some ball or revel through the solitary and silent

* The street of the dead woman. It is so called in commemoration of the well-known romantic story of Ginevra degli Almieri, who passed along it in her shroud, when escaping from her premature tomb.

streets on a moonlight night. He is crossing, we will suppose, the wide open space between the west front of the cathedral and the baptistry, with the lilt of the last polka or the *motivo* of a favourite melody of Verdi running through his brain as he strolls homewards enjoying the delicious temperature of a southern summer night and the fantastically-beautiful effects of the moonlight on the marble columns, arches, and mouldings of the great church and the fairy-like Campanile. Suddenly from out the deep shadow cast by the huge flank of the cathedral emerges with swift and steady but silent step the all-black litter, with its all-black bearers and all-black followers. It comes out into the broad moonlight, a huge blot on the white pavement, ominous of suffering and sorrow; cuts across the mind of him who meets it under such circumstances with as sharp and incisive a contrast as that with which its dismal train blurrs the fair pale

face of the night, and passes on towards the hospital or the deadhouse, according to the need of its burthen.

Pippo, leading his silent party in accordance with the instructions he had received at starting from the permanent official of the brotherhood, pursued his way towards the neighbourhood of Santa Croce, and thence, crossing the Arno by the *Ponte alle Grazie*, the first of the four bridges under which the river flows within the walls of the city, down the broad *Via de' Renai*, and so past the San Miniato gate, into the street leading to the *Porta San Niccolo*.

The region lying immediately beneath the shadow of the black and grim old tower which surmounts the St. Nicholas gate is the most squalid and unsightly of all Florence, and the inhabitants belong evidently and exclusively to the poorest class. The brethren of the Misericordia are well acquainted with the district, for their

visits in the wake of those of disease and death are frequent in proportion to the poverty of the district. The aspect of the *Borgo San Niccolo,* however, must not be imagined as at all resembling in excess of destitution the worst portions of our own great cities. No such extremity of misery and desolation exists in Florence as may be witnessed in London, Manchester, or Liverpool; still less is it marked by any of those features of lawlessness which characterize some of the districts inhabited by the "dangerous classes" of our towns. There are isolated criminals but there are no dangerous classes at Florence. And the *Borgo di San Niccolo,* as well as any other of the poorest quarters of the city, may be traversed by anybody at any hour in perfect safety.

All was perfectly still as the Brethren passed down the street. Here and there a feeble glimmer of light in a chamber win-

dow marked a house, at the door of which the Misericordia might very probably have to set down their litter ere many days were over. But the procession now passed on without encountering a single soul, till it came very near the black old tower of the gateway. There, at the small narrow door of a three-storied house, stood an elderly woman, evidently on the look-out for the arrival of the brotherhood. A small lamp stood on the ground in the narrow passage behind her, and showed the first step or two of a steep stair at the further end of it. On the window-sills of the third floor, and on a little shelf suspended below them, were several small plaster of Paris models placed to dry, which indicated that the tenant of that floor—or at least of that room—was a modeller.

The woman crossed herself, muttered a short prayer, and made a deep reverence as the train stopped and placed the litter on the ground before the door.

"What floor?" asked the Captain, in a low voice.

"Third floor; the bottom of the passage looking into the courtyard," replied the woman, in the same low tone.

"The passage is narrow probably?" asked again the black-masked figure.

"It is something narrow, and the doorway is *very* narrow," returned the woman.

The Captain turned to one of the bearers nearest him, and whispered a few words. The man addressed lifted the cover of the litter, and taking from it a pair of large and perfectly clean, but coarse and strong coverlets or counterpanes, proceeded to carry them up the staircase, followed by five of his companions. The Captain and the other members of the band remained below with the litter before the door. Of the six who had glided noiselessly up the narrow stair one after the other, two entered the chamber indicated to them, while the others

stood in a line along the narrow passage outside the door. One black figure of those who had entered stepped up on either side to the head of the poor pallet bed on which the sick person was lying: a young girl, evidently in the last stage of consumption—a very common case!—more so, probably, than is supposed by many, who hold the common but very erroneous opinion that pulmonary consumption is, if not peculiar, at least especially predominant in our own race and in our own latitudes.

The two mute figures exchanged a glance through the eye-holes in their black hoods, and one of them stooping over the sick girl, said in a low voice—

"Are you able to raise yourself, sister?"

"Hardly, I fear. I have become very much weaker latterly," replied a voice, barely audible to the man whose head hung over her.

"And perhaps moving makes you cough?

Don't attempt it. We shall manage without any exertion on your part. Shall the good woman there come to arrange your dress before we move you?"

"That has been done in readiness. We have made the best preparation we could," replied the low hollow whisper, while the large and sunken, but still bright eyes cast a wistful and piteous glance at the hideously masked figure hanging over her.

Not a glance of terror, such as in any other country a poor sick girl might well have felt at the approach of two such ministers to her sick bed; for the aspect of the Brethren of the Misericordia is too familiar to every Florentine from his earliest years; the respect in which they are held and the confidence felt in their skilful kindness is too general, and among the poorer classes the idea that one day, sooner or later, it will probably fall to the lot of any one of them to be carried to the hospital in one of

those well-known litters, is too much part and parcel of their minds for the dismal masquerading under which the brotherhood does its ministering to affect the imagination as it would elsewhere.

"Lie still, then, and make no exertion, and leave us to move you," replied the mask, in very gentle tones.

And then, with all the delicacy and gentleness of women, but with the strength and firmness of movement of men, the two proceeded with wonderful dexterity and adroitness to pass one of the coverlets beneath the light and emaciated figure of the sick girl, in which she was entirely wrapped. The other was then similarly slipped under her, so as to serve as a kind of sling in which to carry her down stairs. Little, however, as the movement caused by these arrangements had been, it produced an access of coughing, which seemed to threaten the possibility that it might change the nature of the task

to be performed by the Brethren. He who had previously spoken now pulled a small crucifix from his pocket, and placing it in her hands, stood aside to wait until the fit of coughing should have passed.

Fixed to the bare white wall at the head of the bed by a small nail, there was a coloured print of the Madonna of the Seven Sorrows; and when the black figure placed the crucifix in her hand, the sick girl pointed to this soiled and worn bit of paper, and motioned that it should be given her. The man at once comprehended her wish, and unfixing the picture from the wall, handed it to her.

Gradually the cough subsided, and then the four men outside were called into the room, and while each one took a corner of the counterpane, the other two placed themselves one at the head the other at the feet, ready to give any assistance that might be needed in conveying the light burthen down the narrow stair.

It is a special rule of the Misericordia that the Brethren in attendance on a litter should so dispose themselves and should lift the large cover of the litter in such a manner as to shield the sick person about to be placed in it as much as possible from the curious gaze of the neighbours or of chance passengers in the street. And although at that hour of night there were no prying eyes abroad from which to guard their charge, the Brethren, as is usually the case with men acting in conformity to a prescribed form of routine in which the minutest details are provided for by unvarying rules, proceeded in exact accordance with their prescriptive usages.

In this manner the patient was laid softly and carefully in the litter by those who had brought her down, the large arched lid was closed over her, and the entire party prepared to start on their way to the great "Arch-hospital" of Santa Maria. As those

of the Brethren who had remained below proceeded to lift the long poles on which the litter is carried to their shoulders, and the others in their turn formed themselves two and two behind it, one of the latter whispered a few words to the Captain, who thereupon placed one of the number immediately in front of the litter. It was the duty of the brother so placed to keep a vigilant watch on the sick person in the litter during the time of their passage through the city by lifting from time to time the front part of the covering. This precaution is taken when there is reason to fear that the object of their work of mercy may expire before the hospital is reached; and the object is to obviate the possibility of a death without the performance of the last rites in however hurried a manner. The person charged with this duty strikes three little blows on one of the poles of the litter if he sees any immediately alarming symptoms, and that

is a signal to the bearers immediately to set down the litter on the ground.

In this order the procession commenced its return journey.

They passed up the Via de Renai, recrossed the bridge, traversed for a short space the Lung Arno, and thence reached the Piazza by the small street which runs at the back of the Uffizi. There they emerged once more into the full broad moonlight, which was casting a weird but yet beautiful light on the David of Michael Angelo and on the statues under the arches of the mighty Loggia di Orgagna. They were just passing the steps of the Palace of the Republic at the feet of the David, when the three ominous taps on the pole of the litter from the hand of the watcher in front caused the party suddenly to halt and gently place their burthen on the moonlit pavement.

Two of the bearers raised the cover of it,

while the Captain, little doubting the cause of the halt, stooped down in front to take the articles needed for Roman Catholic ministration *in articulo mortis* from their receptacle. When the great black cover was laid aside the cause which had led the brother on the watch to stop the litter was but too apparent.

There lay all white in the black framework of the litter, the slender figure of a young girl of from twenty to five-and-twenty years of age. The head was a little raised on a small pillow, so that the moonbeams poured down on the wan and hollow but still beautiful features. The remarkably abundant auburn hair lay on either side of the face, almost covering the little pillow with its thick wavy tresses, and falling over the bust down to the waist. But in the midst between these rivers of hair, over the white dress and the coverlet, there ran a bright red stream, welling out with each

pulsation from the heart, and draining away rapidly the ebbing life.

She had broken a blood-vessel, and the brother on watch at the head of the litter-bier had not stopped the progress of the convoy a moment too soon. It was a piteous sight the high-sailing serene moon and the meek stars looked down upon, as that pale slight figure, with upward-glancing eye and mild long-suffering expression on its tranquil features, lay there on its black death-bed bier, with those strange and dismal-looking faceless figures around her. The black ebony crucifix lay between the passive fingers of the long white slender hands upon her bosom; and but for the ghastly blood-river, that marred the white purity of the figure and its narrow bed enframed in black, it would be difficult to imagine the picture of a more tranquil and peaceful adieu to earth and the blue overarching sky, to which her eyes were upturned, than that death-bed

on the broad white pavement of the Piazza.

There were no familiar voices around her to cause the last sounds which the dulling ear was capable of receiving to carry with them assurances of the affection for which that still pulsing heart had yearned so vainly during its pilgrimage! There were no dear hands to press for the last time those which had longed, oh! so wearily, so patiently, for the grasp of a beloved one! Strange repulsive-looking figures were around her, kindly indeed in intention, but awful-looking, and to the imagination and the eye scarcely human in the faceless hideousness of their disguisement. But as in death, so it had been with the young heart then so near its rest in life. And the goal she had at length reached she had been, as the reader knows, eagerly and long looking to.

So lay La Beata under the strong, clear

moonbeam, exactly in front of the Misericordia captain, when he raised his head from seeking the articles needed, according to Romish practice, for the passing of a soul.

To her, Pippo in his disguisement was of course entirely undistinguishable from any other of the black figures around her; but no second glance through the eye-holes of his cowl was needed to flash on his brain the entire facts of the sight before him.

The Piazza had been, since the Misericordia procession entered it, as silent and deserted as if no life existed within miles of it. But just as Pippo raised his head, and caught the sight of that form and face which stamped itself indelibly on his brain for the rest of his mortal career, a couple of belated revellers crossed the far corner of the Piazza towards the *Via Calzaiuoli*, while one of them,—his ear full of the melody, though thinking little of the sense of the words,—

carolled out, in a clear jocund voice, Verdi's celebrated

"O Dio! morir si giovane!"

They passed, little heeding so ordinary a sight as the Misericordia pursuing their avocation at the other end of the Piazza, and the voice died away in the distance. It supplied a commentary on the scene that was passing beneath his eyes, hardly needed to bring home to him the whole significance of it.

The things which he had taken from their box under the litter dropped from his hands on the pavement; and with a sudden movement he dragged from his head the cowl which concealed his features. But still he stood, staring with dilated eyes at the pale unaccusing face before him. As soon as the cowl was removed, the recognition was as instantaneous on the part of the dying girl as on his own. But voice was already gone from her, and the power of the mind or of the muscles over her features had so far

perished that, whatever her inward feeling may have been, her face did not change from its expression of calm tranquillity. And the result under the circumstances was to make it seem to his excited mind as if this meeting were expected by her, and mysteriously foreknown to her. But the shock of it gave her the power to raise her head forward an inch or two from the pillow, and to stretch out her two transparent hands for an instant towards him.

But he did not start forwards towards the head of the litter;—he did not fling himself on his knees by the side of her;—he did not seize that poor still beseeching hand in his;—he did not attempt even now, in those last minutes of the eleventh hour, to utter that one word of love which the dying ears still yearned to hear. There was no other expression in his face than terror — extreme and abject terror.

This, then, was the meeting of which she

had been so certainly assured! Here, then, was the reading of the dream which had foreshown her to him, calling him from his marriage to her death-bed. And those fatal hands still beckoned him away! Was she, then, the embodiment of the curse which rested on him for having put his hand to the plough and looked back;—for having sacrilegiously deserted his ecclesiastical career! Where—where should he escape from those pursuing eyes and from those fatal arms that stretched themselves towards him even from a bier?

After gazing thus horror-stricken and as it were benumbed by superstitious terror, and cowering beneath the avenging spectre of his evil conscience for a few moments, which to him seemed many minutes, Pippo turned and fled across the deserted Piazza and through the silent streets, till, hardly knowing what he did, he found himself in his own studio.

She, when he thus turned and ran from her, for a moment followed him by a slight movement of the arms and head. But the convulsive effort she had made to raise herself under the strong excitement of that strange meeting had caused an increased hæmorrhage from the lungs, and had exhausted the last remnant of vitality in her frame; and she fell back on the pillow, even as he rushed conscience driven across the Piazza, at peace and at rest at last.

* * * *

Few words were spoken among the brothers of the Misericordia who had witnessed this strange scene. Their duty was plain enough. The destination to which they were bound was changed;—that was all! So they proceeded to do the work of mercy, required of them by the circumstance, in the silence enjoined by their regulations, leaving commentary and question on what they had witnessed to a fitter opportunity.

Besides, strange as the circumstances were which had passed before them, they in a great degree told their own tale, intelligibly to most of those men who—like the widow Sappi—had the experience of some fifty years of life in the world. For it is an old story that has been told here;—the old story, sir!—truly the very oldest of old stories;—so that your man of the world, who has witnessed one scene thereof, has little difficulty in divining the antecedents and sequel of the tale.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### CAMALDOLI.

High up among the beech and pine forests that still clothe that part of the Apennine which looks down on and encloses the Dante-sung valley of the Casentino is the celebrated monastery of Camaldoli. A visit to it constitutes a frequent and favourite excursion for strangers, who prolong their stay at Florence sufficiently far into the summer months, to be sure that winter has departed at length from the mountain tops; for the climate of Camaldoli is as rigorous as that of Switzerland. But in summer or autumn the spot is not only exceedingly beautiful, but exquisitely delicious from its tem-

perature to those who come from the blaze of the lower valleys.

As usual, the monks who selected this spot for their retirement chose admirably well. While the neighbouring districts of the Apennines are barren rock and arid sand for many a mile, the region around Camaldoli is a sylvan paradise of meadow, wood, and water.

Admiring sons of Mother Church, her institutions, and her austerities, would have it believed that this and so many other similar sites were selected by the pious hermits, who, in most instances, were the first founders of such establishments, with no eye either to their picturesque beauty or to the more solid advantages they promised, but solely for the sake of their remoteness from the living world, its concerns, and its temptations, the rigour of their winter climate, and the profoundness of their solitude. But less docile minds are apt to imagine that, at

least in these latter days, the communities located in these places both know well, and take good care to draw from them all the means of wealth and comfortable living which they are capable of supplying.

Now the good fathers at Camaldoli, a branch of the great Carthusian Order, may be cited as an example in support of either of the above theories; for their establishment and their community is divided into two parts, in one of which the former, while in the other the latter is very consistently carried out.

The principal and lower monastery is a huge irregular pile of buildings situated at that point of the mountain's height where the upper pine forests cease, and the lower and more mildly beautiful beech woods begin. It is surrounded by the loveliest wood-encircled meadows, ranged over by abundant herds, well sheltered from the blasts that even in summer vex the upper Apennine,

and well supplied with every comfort necessary for a studious and healthful life. The inmates live there in community and in the enjoyment of such society as may be found in other monastic establishments.

They are the lords of a very considerable and productive territory around, above, and beneath them. A productive and well-tilled garden lies close under the convent walls. A well-stocked dairy farm, lying in beautifully green slopes, such as the lower valleys could not show, fenced around and sheltered by thick masses of beech forest, forms a striking oasis of smiling fertility in the midst of the surrounding barrenness of the Apennine. But the appendage of which the good fathers are most proud, and which the worthy 'padre forestieraio'—he to whom the duty of receiving strangers is assigned—used some years since to point out to visitors as a miracle of art and science, is a very simple saw-mill, worked by a little

torrent streamlet, which comes tumbling down from the upper Apennine close to the convent wall. Nor is it without reason that the good fathers make a pet of their saw-mill, standing two or three of them together, as they will, watching its untiring operation with infinite zest and satisfaction; for its gratuitous labours add infinitely to the profits of their forest property on the mountain above them. Some of the finest pine timber in the world grows on the western Apennine slope above Camaldoli. Better means of transport are needed to make these forests yet more valuable. But, even as matters are, or were rather, masts for the British navy have been furnished from the pine-woods of Camaldoli. Once on a time the monastery possessed far more extensive tracts of forest than it now owns, but some it lost at the time of the French invasion, and some have been since taken from the monks on the ground of mismanagement of property too

large for them. Below, in the valley which runs down from the gorge, in which the convent is niched, into the rich and fertile Casentino, the disciples of St. Romuald possess more than one good farm, which supply the fathers with corn, and oil, and wine;—the latter of very generous and excellent quality. Their lowland possessions supply them also with an article very useful for fast-days—a haricot bean of such specially excellent quality, that a yearly present of them is sent by the convent to the holy father at Rome; as the 'padre forestieraio' does not fail to inform his guests. In short, the life at Camaldoli is not an intolerable one.

At the other branch of the institution all is very different. The *Sagro Eremo,** as it is called, is situated far up the mountain, very near the topmost crest of the Apennine, from which it is said both seas, the Adriatic and the Mediterranean, are visible.

* Holy hermitage.

The climate is most severe. The *Eremo* consists of a number of small isolated cottages, together with a church surrounded by an enclosing wall, outside which the wind howls almost ceaselessly through the surrounding pine forests. The life there is as different from that of the lower community as is the nature of the locality. The inmates are not cœnobites, but essentially hermits. There is no common life, no common refectory, no society, no communication of one recluse with his brother. All conversation is forbidden. The human voice is heard only in the constant services in the chapel. Even visitors are directed to speak below their breath while they remain within those dreary precincts. The wall in each isolated cell is furnished with a sort of trap-door; and through it is passed the inmate's daily ration of bread and vegetables, no animal food, except on one or two days in the year, forming any portion of their diet. Here, at

least, if heaven can be won by voluntary abstinence from every material comfort, every social enjoyment, and every exercise of the affections, with which an all-bountiful Creator has thought fit to endow his creatures, are men who are earnest in striving to merit it.

It should be mentioned that within the enclosure there is a very considerable library well furnished with works of historical as well as ascetic theology. The books may be freely taken by the inmates to their cells, each one of which contains, in addition to a sleeping-room, an oratory and a "study." But the fact is—and it supplies a remarkably significant commentary on the results most likely to be produced on the human intellect by the life here led—that no use whatever is made of the volumes.

The same curious and instructive moral may be read, perhaps even more remarkably set forth, in the state of the little garden

attached to each of the isolated hermitages within the wall of the *Sagro Eremo*. Every one of these dreary, bleak-looking, stone-built dwellings has in front of it a small plot of ground enclosed within a low stone wall, which is entirely at the disposition of the inmate. There in solitude, but in the complete exercise of the right of uncontrolled ownership, the hermit is at liberty to indulge in the primeval pleasure of creating and embellishing a garden. Horticulture, it must be admitted, is carried on somewhat at a disadvantage at this altitude among the howling blasts that almost continually sweep the pine forests in their passage across the Apennine from one to the other sea. Still human care and labour have embellished yet more unpromising localities. A morsel of well-tended turf and a few such hardy flowers as could brave the climate would gladden the eye, would impart a certain charm of home-like feeling to the cheerless

dwelling, and, above all, would supply the altogether invaluable boon of occupation to the recluse. It is the one solitary concession to the imperious needs of one important constituent part of human nature, made by the rules of the founder; and it seems almost incredible that men situated as these solitaries are should neglect to profit by it. Yet such is almost if not quite invariably the fact. There are the little enclosures utterly neglected and uncared for, adding by their weed-grown and desolate-looking appearance a feature the more, and a very striking one, to the absolutely miserable aspect of the place. We know that criminals, whose whole lives have been dissipated in idleness, clamour for the indulgence of being allowed to work, after having been subjected for a while to the terrible effects of solitude and enforced inaction; but these holy men will neither employ the mind in study nor the body in the most pleasing of all bodily

labour. One would have thought that these restricted little patches of earth would have exhibited the results of a superabundance of labour and affectionate care. One would have expected that each pebble and each blade of grass would show that it had been the object of human care and thought; but all is barren and desolate, as are the lives passed in this desolate place. It is very strange—appalling even—when it is considered how small a mistake in the road may lead men to brutishness who fancy that they are travelling on the path towards superhuman sanctification.

The inhabitants of this fearful torture-place are of three classes. They consist of novices, who are expected to prove the earnestness of their call to the monastic life by one or two years' residence at the *Eremo*, before they are permitted to descend to the comparatively luxurious life of the monastery below; or, secondly, of monks sent thither

from the latter establishment as a measure of punishment; or, thirdly, of men who, by a permanent residence there, hope either to acquire a title to the rewards supposed to await especial and extra sanctity, or to wipe out from the eternal judgment-roll the record of some deed, which they can never more hope to erase from that of their own conscience.

A visitor to this melancholy place, aware of these facts, is tempted, when in the chapel he has all the members of the uncommunicating community before him, to speculate on the cause, among the above three, to which the presence there of each of the uncowled heads before him is due. And in most cases the faces tell their own tale with sufficient clearness to enable him to make a shrewd guess at the truth.

There are the young novice faces, healthy and florid-looking for the most part, heavy, stolid, and animal in type and development

almost invariably. It is difficult to imagine the causes which can have led such idiosyncrasies to assume the habit and pronounce the monastic vows. It would seem as if a sluggish temperament, phlegmatic in its indifference to the temptations of the world, and alive mainly to an aversion to laborious exertion, were the incitements to a 'vocation' most widely in operation. Then the second category—the hermits on penal sentence—represented perhaps by two or three out of the entire number, are more difficult to be recognized. What can be imagined to be the misconduct thus punished? Is it, mayhap, likely that any such condemnations are to be attributed rather to the results of the jealousies, bickerings, and hatreds which are sure to be found in more or less virulence among the members of a community in which better subjects of interest are scanty, than to any other cause? The third class, again, are for the most part marked by cha-

racteristics legible enough. At least mere animalism is not the type of this category. Fanaticism of any sort, mischievous and degrading as it may be, has always at least so much of respectability as strength and earnestness can confer. There is more variety, too, among the individuals of this class. There is the Fra Angelico sort of head of the candidate for high spiritual honours, with mild passionless eyes, high-peaked narrow head, mean undeveloped brow, and thin lips, a temperament untempted by passion, incapable of real virtue, a selfish spiritual miser, always hoarding in hope to accumulate a 'plum' in the stock that appears to him the safest. Then there is the richer-natured type of those shipwrecked ones, who have struggled out of the deep waters to this dreary shore, to use it as a refuge and a purgatory. Among these may be marked the impotency of macerations of the body to still the voices of undying me-

mory; the possibilities of rebellion yet lurking in eyes flashing from beneath a cowl, and sometimes the calm of victory won after internecine struggle.

Some ten or twelve years ago a couple of Englishmen, thus exercising their skill in physiognomy, marked especially one among the shaved heads in that little chapel, which they fancied they could assign to the category to which it belonged with considerable certainty. He was a tall man, who had evidently once been handsome, and, indeed, was so still, as far as beauty may be held to be compatible with hollow eyes, sunken temples, and emaciated cheeks. He was still in the prime of his years; but it was easy to read on that face, that some lightning blast of crime, or misfortune, or both, and of anguish certainly, had passed over, and indelibly scathed it. At a certain point in the service he stepped from his seat to the foot of the altar, and there prostrate, with his forehead

touching the marble step, and arms spread to their full extent, in such a manner as to form together with his head and body the figure of a cross, remained for many minutes. Then thrice striking his forehead against the pavement, he arose and returned to his seat. The curiosity of the visitors was sufficiently excited to induce them, being still at the *Eremo*, to enter the chapel again during the afternoon service. And again they witnessed the same acts performed by the same penitent.

The whole bearing of the man was so remarkable, that they were induced to ask of the monk appointed to receive and act as guide to strangers, and who for this purpose has an express dispensation from the rule of silence, what was the name of him who had so excited their interest. He was Frá Simone, they were told; and it was added that he had been a voluntary inmate of the *Eremo* ever since his admission to the Order.

Of course, it was impossible there to push their inquiries any further; but on returning to the quarters, in which they had been hospitably received at the innless little town of Prato Vecchio, in the Casentino valley, at the bottom of the mountain on which the monastery stands, they spoke of Frá Simone and his remarkable appearance and strange devotions, and found that his story was well known to their landlady.

The tale which has been narrated in the preceding pages is the result of the gossip's chronicle obtained from that source.

For Frá Simone, as will have been already divined by the reader, was no other than he who had been "known in the world" as Filippo Lonari.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE FLIGHT.

On reaching his own chamber, after his flight from the Piazza on that memorable night of the 23rd of June, Pippo passed the hours until the time at which the city gates are open in a state of superstitious terror and remorseful anguish bordering on insanity.

It was characteristic of the nature of the man, and of the fatal destruction of every principle of true and natural morality in his soul, which had resulted from the lessons of his early training, that his evil conscience, even when awakened to avenging activity by events that irresistibly appealed to its powerful and never-failing ally the imagina-

tion, lashed him indeed with scorpion thongs, but lashed him awrong. It was not the infamous desertion of the hapless victim of his heartlessness, selfishness, and base worldliness that weighed upon his soul; it was not even the sin of which he had been guilty in his connexion with her. The first, according to the teaching of a creed which had demoralized him sufficiently to render such teachings credible to him, was in truth the performance of a duty. The second was a sin easily to be wiped out by certain due and prescribed appliances. It was the unpardonable enormity of having abandoned his sacred calling, of having 'put his hand to the plough and looked back,' that filled his mind with intolerable terrors. Nothing so fatally dwarfs the intellect as systematized and continued misdirection of the moral sentiments. Much learning and large and varied acquirements may be found coexistent with such depravation often enough,

but a large and healthy development of the intelligence never. In the fatality which, as it seemed to him, rendered it impossible for him to escape from the connexion he had formed with La Beata, and made that the means of destroying the schemes of worldly prosperity and advancement so near their accomplishment, Pippo saw only the providential punishment of his first sacrilegious sin. Before that final catastrophe a certain amount of superstitious fear connected with La Beata's claim upon him had, as we have seen, worried him and made him nervous; and when the terrible shock of that fearful meeting in the open piazza, under the overarching vault of heaven, palsied him with sudden terror, it never occurred to him that by preserving his incognito beneath the all-concealing hood of the Misericordia, nothing need ever be known, even to the dying girl herself, of any relationship between the brother of the Misericordia and the patient.

To his excited imagination it seemed that the providentially timed apparition of La Beata to claim him, so few minutes before she was to quit the scene for ever, and so few hours before the accomplishment of his marriage —to claim him with those outstretched arms reaching towards him from her bier—made the consummation of his plans hopeless and impossible. He felt detected and exposed before God and man. The whole story of his wickedness and its chastisement would in a few hours be known to the whole city, and the hypocrisy which had led him to assume the holy office of a Brother of the Confraternity of Mercy, would be seen by all men to have been made the means of his detection and punishment.

His whole mind, therefore, as far as the shattered and overbalanced powers of it could be said to act at all, was bent on escaping from the imminent exposure and contumely which awaited him, and ulteriorly

from the punishment due to his dereliction of his holy calling. For the first purpose nothing short of immediate flight from the city could avail. Florence is not as London or Paris, in the immensity of which it is more easy for a man to disappear and be hidden from all eyes that ever before looked on him, than in any other part of earth's surface. It is impossible for a Florentine to remain hidden in Florence, but it was not possible to leave the city unquestioned till the gates should be open in the morning; and the few hours which intervened between the scene in the Piazza and the dawn were passed by him in an agony of feverish impatience and an attempt to determine on some plan of conduct. Whither was he to betake himself? The world was all against him—every world! his original ecclesiastical connexions, his subsequent friends in the world of art, and now that respectable portion of society to which he had vainly hoped to ally

himself! Where was he to find a refuge? where hide himself from the contempt and the hostility of the world? where find means and opportunity to reconcile himself with heaven?

It is to men whose faults, follies, or misfortunes have brought them to this pass that the cloister offers itself as an invaluable haven. It supplies exactly everything that the needs of their case require. When among sterner Protestant communities nothing is left to the despairing and the weak save physical suicide, more indulgent Catholicism offers the milder measure, as it is deemed, of merely moral suicide instead. To the irremediably bankrupt in hope, in character, in fortune, in energy, in reputation, the cloister assuredly does offer that which no other institution yet invented among men can supply. How admirable, then, the provision! it is cried; how lamentable—how unpardonable the hiatus in the system which has destroyed a shelter so

blessed! But may not mercy to the thousands who would fall if their every energy were not taxed to keep themselves on their legs, dictate the refusal of this all-covering mercy to those who have fallen? Is it well that to all who find the path of life laborious and difficult it should be loudly declared and shown that those who refuse to walk in it are to be carried? Is it not better to trust to the eternally ordained governance of Providence also in this matter, in the full assurance that moral causes produce their normal effects to beneficent ends, and that it is a short-sighted wisdom which seeks to reverse the decrees pronounced by their legitimate operation? Of course the conclusions to which such considerations would lead are applicable to other social arrangements besides monastic institutions, and it may be that the world will some day see wisdom in the unreserved acceptation of them. At all events it would seem to be clear thus far that those

social systems which have gone furthest in accepting such principles, which have most courageously determined on allowing the Juggernauth car of moral law to pursue its course without interference, and which have advanced furthest towards seeing that in this department also whatever is is right, have, in fact, nursed fewer weaklings to be crushed by those Juggernauth wheels, and are themselves walking erect in the van of human advance and improvement.

Pippo Lonari was the product of a system which acted in every respect to the utmost of its power on diametrically opposite notions and principles. To him the cloister offered a haven of escape from the shipwreck to which his navigation of his bark had legitimately led; and gradually, during those few hours of terror, despair, and anguish, a clear determination to seek that haven in the mountain solitude of Camaldoli formed itself in his mind.

As soon, therefore, as the hour had arrived at which it was possible for him to leave the city he slunk suspiciously through the empty morning streets to the *Porta Santa Croce*, and felt, with a sensation of relief, that as he passed through it he was leaving Florence, its men and women, its aims, and hopes, and fears behind him for ever. Once clear of the city, he sped along the road leading to the upper valley of the Arno as if he had been pursued in bodily shape by the avenger, whom in reality he carried with him in his own breast. For many hours he held on his course, breasting at speed the long ascent which climbs the high ground that separates the Valdarno from the Casentino, and conscious of a mitigation of the terror that spurred him onwards as the rapidly rising road brought him out of the thickly-inhabited valley into the solitude of the open mountain. After many hours of walking under the now burning sun, absolute ex-

haustion compelled him to throw himself down in the shade at the foot of a roadside chestnut-tree. He then reflected that he had not tasted food that day, and that without it it would be impossible for him to continue his route, or reach the yet distant monastery. There is a little solitary roadside inn at the top of the mountain pass, which was a few hundred yards from the spot where he was lying, and which could supply him with the food that was so necessary to him. But it now occurred to him, for the first time, that he had never thought of putting any money in his pocket ere leaving his studio. He had thought of nothing but headlong flight. He had, however, his watch in his pocket, which, as he said bitterly to himself, he should assuredly never need again, and he determined to ask for breakfast at the inn, and then tender his watch as security for payment, explaining that he had accidentally lost his purse. Having eaten and

slept afterwards, though very disturbedly, for a couple of hours, he felt able to continue his journey. His way now led him down from the altitude he had gained into the valley of the Casentino to the little town of Prato Vecchio.

It was strange how strong a reluctance he felt to enter the remote little town. In vain he told himself that it was impossible that any tidings of him, or his affairs, or his flight should have reached the place. There were human eyes there on every side, and it was intolerable to him to feel that they were resting on him; yet it was necessary for him to make up his mind to enter the town. for the infant Arno, there some half-dozen miles from its source in the flank of Monte Falterona, had to be crossed, and the only means of doing so was by the bridge of Prato Vecchio. It was the cool evening hour too of the close of the long summer day, and all the population of the little town was, after

Italian fashion, in the streets, the men strolling up and down the little piazza, or lounging in front of the cafés, the women sitting in gossipping groups at the doors of their houses; nevertheless the ordeal must be braved, and that at once, for the miserable, conscience-stricken man had traversed more than thirty miles that day, and was well-nigh exhausted; indeed, nothing less than the goading of such a passion of terror and remorse as that which drove him on could have enabled him to accomplish the feat he had performed, and seven more miles had yet to be traversed before he could throw himself down at the convent door; these seven miles, moreover, were by far the most difficult part of the journey. Hitherto he had traversed a good and well-made, though mountainous road, but there is none such from the valley of the Casentino to the high lying mountain solitude of Camaldoli. A mere track, barely good enough to be

used as a bridle-path for the little surefooted mountain horses and the charcoal-burners' mules, leads over the dreary and barren mountains which intervene between the monastery and this part of the valley, and are changed in character to woodland verdure only in the immediate neighbourhood of Camaldoli. It is a path, moreover, hardly to be found by one traversing it for the first time, impossible even to find the beginning of it by which the traveller must quit the little town. It was absolutely necessary, therefore, for Pippo not only to expose himself to the observation of the people, but to communicate with some among them in search of a guide.

Haggard and footsore, with down-looking hang-dog mien, he limped across the bridge into the town, and up the quaint old-fashioned little street, with its low-browed colonnades on either side, under which the women and children were gathered enjoying

the evening breeze from the mountains, chattering in groups, and making remarks, as he felt, on him and his woe-begone appearance, as he painfully dragged himself over the flagstones up the middle of the street, casting stealthy, suspicious glances on either side as he went, in search of some one of whom he would venture to seek the information he required. He thus passed through the entire street till he came to the little open piazza at the end of it. There, at the further end of the open space, he saw a couple of charcoal-burners engaged in binding a quantity of empty sacks on the pack-saddles of two mules. It was to be presumed that they were bound for the mountain, and as, of course, their business took them to the forest, it was probable that they were going in the direction of Camaldoli, and would at all events know the way thither. To these men, therefore, Pippo, after some hesitation, made up his

mind to address himself. He learned that they were, in fact, on the point of starting for the forests on the other side of the crest of the Apennine in the neighbourhood of the *Sagro Eremo* above Camaldoli, so that their way was the same as his to within about a mile of the end of his journey. Pippo told them that he was on his way to visit a brother, who was a member of the confraternity at the monastery: that his means had not allowed him to make the journey otherwise than on foot; that he had not been aware of the distance, and was, therefore, pretty nearly knocked up, but still determined to reach the convent that night. The men made no objection to his accompanying them, and after a few minutes' delay he again set forward to climb the mountain. It is impossible to imagine a more dreary and desolate track than that which crosses this part of the Apennine. The barrenness of the mountains, from which all the upper soil has been car-

ried away by a thousand rills, turned into torrents by every heavy rain, to form the slowly rising plain beyond Pisa, is such that not even a blade of grass can grow on wide districts of them: and the naked surface of the friable schistous soil, varying from sand to slate-colour, looked weird and ghastly in the cool white moonlight, as Pippo limped wearily and painfully in the rear of the two gaunt black figures and the two mules with their black burthen of empty sacks. Nevertheless, it was better to have to make that journey under the cool light of the moon than under the blaze of the summer sun. The utter solitude, too, of the region he was traversing was acceptable and reassuring to the fugitive. But the most potent anodyne to agonizing thoughts and spiritual terrors was sheer exhaustion and bodily suffering. In such natures as that of Pippo corporeal present pain will always, by its superior claims on the attention, divert the mind from

mental suffering; and as he struggled onwards, doubting whether his strength would last to carry him to his destination, his imagination left all other subjects to fix itself on ideas of simple rest. What eye could follow him into the desolate solitudes he was now traversing? He almost felt as if repose and food would have sufficed to procure him complete contentment. At length the party reached the spot where their roads were to separate, but the rest of the way to the convent presented no difficulties. It was on the outer edge of the oasis of verdure and fertility amid which the convent was placed, and thence to the building itself a good road had been constructed through the beechwoods, and along the edges of pasture fields, by the monks themselves. When the charcoal-burners, therefore, had bidden him good night and left him to pursue their way to the upper part of the mountain, he had only to follow this clear path for somewhat less than a mile.

But it was by that time late ; long past the early monastic hour of closing gates and retiring each man to his cell, to make the most of the short hours allowed for sleep by the rules of the order. Pippo staggered up to the great gate of the building, absolutely reeling with exhaustion from his long fast and from fatigue. He pulled the chain hanging by the side of the door, which sent a clanging peal through the silent and re-echoing corridors within that startled him, and then flung himself on the flag-pavement before the gate. It was some little time before the lay brother, who acted as porter, was sufficiently roused from his sleep to come to the door in answer to his summons; and when at length he opened it the utterly exhausted traveller had fallen asleep as he lay on the flag-stones at the gate. The lay brother who opened the door manifested no surprise at this condition of the tardy applicant for admission. He had probably

witnessed similar arrivals before in the course of his experience. He held his lantern down to the sleeping man's face and roused him from his already deep lethargy with some difficulty. To him Pippo only expressed, in the fewest possible words, his urgent need of repose and food, and the white-robed venerably-bearded figure as laconically bade him enter, placed a modicum of bread and wine before him, indicated a sleeping-place like those used in soldiers' guard-rooms, and then left him to return to his own cell.

Due report was made after the early matin service in the choir, of the arrival during the night; but Pippo's sleep lasted for several hours after that, and the good monks did not disturb it. But when he waked, instead of accepting the breakfast of bread and water offered to him and going on his way, as many a belated traveller across those mountains, after a night's hospitality at the

convent, did in the common course of things, he requested to be brought to the prior. He was taken to a cell in no respect differing from the others on either side of it, and was received there by a monk altogether undistinguished either by costume or mode of life from all the others in the community. The old man listened with an apparent absence of surprise or emotion to the tale Pippo poured forth, curious enough to mark;—listened with the calm and attentive air with which a physician, long accustomed to such statements, listens to the case of his patients; and having heard he judged that the case was one to which treatment according to their system of moral pathology was clearly applicable.

In his communication with the prior Pippo did not enter into any of the particulars of his story, or of the troubles which made him wish for the shelter of a cloister, nor would the monk have wished him to do so. All

this would be matter to be spoken of in the confessional. But there were cases in which it was better not to know the antecedent histories of those who sought to break off entirely and for ever all connexion with their former life. In general terms Pippo accused himself of being a grievous sinner, making it clear, however, that they were *sins*, not *crimes*, which drove him from the world, and that he had in no way made himself obnoxious to the laws. He professed himself wholly and irrevocably disgusted with and weary of the world, and determined to dedicate his remaining years to penitence and prayer and the endeavour to make his peace with God. He avowed having in early youth been educated for the church, and showed the prior that his attainments were such as to justify him in aspiring, when the term of his noviciate should be passed, to enter the order as a clerk. The result of his conference with the prior was that he was at

once received into the monastery, and in due course, as soon as the necessary formalities could be gone through, and the requisite authorizations obtained, was admitted to the noviciate, and finally into the order. As a novice he had, according to rule, been sent to pass the accustomed time at the Sagro Eremo, and he never left it again.

It has often been considered surprising that on occasions when revolutions or other extraordinary occurrences have afforded to the inmates of convents the opportunity of returning to the living world from their cloister, so few have ever been willing to avail themselves of the chance. It might be supposed that in many, if not in the majority of cases, the impulse which had induced a man to seek the shelter of a cloister would be transient; that the moral suicide committed in a moment of despair would be repented of when too late; but an abundantly sufficient number of examples have

occurred, and on record, to prove that the rule is otherwise. In such a case as that of Filippo Lonari, for instance, the ordinary experience which the world has of the motives, resolves, and repentances of such men would assuredly lead to the expectation that his convent vocation would be short-lived; yet it was not so. It would seem as if there were some law in operation which renders him who has once lived a monastic life consciously unfit for any other. As the light of day is intolerable to the eyes of prisoners who have long been immured in dungeons deprived of it, so the monk seems to shrink from the active life beyond his convent wall.

Pippo might at all events have at any time left the *Sagro Eremo* to return to the convent at Camaldoli and its comparative luxury and ease; but having once gone up that melancholy looking steep paved path amid the thick and gloomy pine forest which ascends from the monastery to the

hermitage, he never retraced the road. It was about three years after his reception into the order that he attracted the observation of the two English visitors, as has been related, and he lived only some five years after that. The shock that he had undergone produced, as it would seem, a permanent and indelible effect upon his mind; and it may be doubted whether the life at the *Sagro Eremo* was calculated to restore it to tone and health. The tranquillity, security, religious exercises, and quiet companionship incidental to ordinary monastic life might have tended to do so, but the terrible solitude, the gloomy character of the melancholy ever-moaning, pining woods, which shut him in from the world, even the physical effects of the ascetic lenten diet, all contributed probably to increase the morbid condition of his mind. Nor was his idiosyncrasy one likely to offer much resistance to the effect of the influences in operation

within and around him. The combination of sacerdotal training with the artistic temperament was not a happy one, or calculated to encourage the growth of intellectual stamina, or contribute to any tolerably healthy balance of the faculties; a system and a combination which dwarfed and distorted the moral sentiments, discouraged the judgment, misled the conscience, fostered and inflamed the imagination, sharpened the æsthetic faculties, and habituated the mind to subject itself to the influences of them and to no others, was admirably adapted to aid the development of a selfish heartless worldling into an always equally selfish fanatic, with an intellect reeling under the effect of the one ever-present fixed idea, of struggling to escape from the imminent danger of eternal torment. Assuredly Pippo—or Frá Simone, as he should now be called—would hardly have been pronounced to be of sound mind during the eight years of his residence at

the *Sagro Eremo* by an intelligent physician; but his condition was not exposed to the judgment of any such, and those under whose eyes his life was passed saw only in it evidence of a high and edifying degree of sanctity. His observation of the utmost austerity of the monastic rule was, at all events, most exemplary. His self-concentration appeared to be absolute and entire. Not even on the rare occasions when intercommunication between the inmates of the *Eremo* is permitted as a festival indulgence was he ever known to avail himself of the license. Save in frequent confession he held no intercourse whatever with any human being. Save in the offices of the choir his voice had never been heard within those silent walls. On the two or three high festivals in the year on which the hermits are permitted to feast together on some modicum of animal food, he never either joined 'the festal board' or made any addition to

his usual pittance of bread and vegetables. In the chapel his daily practice has already been described. Beside the four or five daily services in the chapel he repaired daily for solitary devotion to the little oratory formed out of the cell which tradition points out as that in which the sainted founder, St. Romuald, lived and died. His body under this discipline became fearfully emaciated, and a hectic fever shone with a baneful light in the two large hollow eyes that gleamed from under his cowl. Less than all this, uninterruptedly continued for eight years, would have sufficed to merit and attain a reputation among the brotherhood for a high degree of sanctity. And when at last the once powerful and stalwart frame, still in the very midst of what should have been the prime of life, gave way, and the attenuated fever-worn body was evidently near the hour of its dissolution, a knot of the elders of the silent family gathered round the

bare board bed on which the evidently dying man was laid, for the edification to be found in witnessing so holy a death, and to be the witnesses and chroniclers of any such miraculous manifestations as might not improbably be anticipated on such an occasion.

Many and various are the legends of death-bed miracles, revelations, and visions preserved in the records of the Sagro Eremo; nor will it seem otherwise than quite in the natural course of things that they should be so to any one at all conversant with the modes in which the body and its conditions operate upon the mind, and with the process by which the latter may become diseased by restricting its sphere of operation to one single ever-recurring circle of ideas. Enlightened science would agree with the theory of monastic asceticism, so far, at least, as to admit that the visions which the latter deems to be the reward of persevering in a diet of dry bread and green vegetables, are likely

enough to be the result of such a régime, and that the discipline, which is considered by the great doctors of monkish devotion to be the best recipe for changing the mind, is at all events likely to unhinge it.

And the death-bed of Frá Simone was not without its visions, though it was difficult even for the bystanders—who were perfectly convinced of his eminent sanctity—to consider them of an edifying kind. It had to be admitted that the fiend was permitted to fight hard for the high prize of so holy a hermit's soul. And the proof of the final discomfiture of the evil one had to be found in the ultimate state of quiescence that immediately preceded death, and followed the exhaustion of both mind and body. In truth, the agony of that death-bed was a terrible one, and the visions which haunted it were but the intensified forms of the thoughts that had been ever present to the mind of the miserable recluse for the last

eight years. He still saw those white arms stretching out towards him from the black misericordia bier under the moonlight in the Piazza at Florence. There had been no hour of his life since that night in which he had *not* seen them. In the chapel, even as prostrate before the altar he bent his forehead against the marble of the pavement; in the midnight sleepless hours of his cell, while the wind among the pine forests wailed its weird and fitting accompaniment to his imaginings; in the feverish dreaming of his short and fitful sleep, the image which that instant had burned in upon his brain was never absent from him. During eight years, amid the anguish of constant terror, he had striven by such means as his light suggested to him—by maceration, by fasting, by almost unceasing repetition of litanies and penitential psalms—to escape from the pursuing phantom, which seemed ever beckoning him to the pit of endless punishment. And now

at last they reached him—those white deadly arms—they clasped him—they drew him down—he was lost, lost for ever!

Not beatific visions assuredly, those which prompted the delirious ravings of that saintly death-bed to which the fathers of the hermit community had come for edification; yet it was against all rule and precedent, and would have been a grievous blow and discouragement to the theories of the place that such a life as that of Frá Simone should not have availed to vanquish the evil one at last; so it was decided that though the struggle had been an awful one, fearful to witness and to think of, Satan had received a notable and memorable repulse, and Frá Simone was chronicled among the saintly examples of the efficacy of a life passed at the *Sagro Eremo.*

## CHAPTER XX.

### CONCLUSION.

It is needless to dwell on the consternation which fell on our friends at the *cereria* on the morning of the 24th; on poor Beppina's grief; on the rumours, surmises, inquiries, and information more or less correct, resulting from the report of the Misericordia brethren who had been engaged on that last sad "work of mercy" to poor Tina; or on the nine days' wonder which furnished gossip-loving Florence with amusement for that limited period. All this may be easily imagined.

It will be easily understood, also, that this scandalous catastrophe was felt as a great vexation and annoyance in those specially

"right-thinking" circles which had recently committed themselves to the patronage of Filippo Lonari. Such a deplorable scandal to have blazed out to the public eye, so immediately too after the name of the artist had been designated to all Florence as employed in a great religious work by "an august lady!" The august lady felt exceedingly disgusted, and her disgust communicated itself from link to link in the "respectable" social chain, causing in each a painful shock as it passed, till it reached poor old Laudadio in his *cereria*, on whom the blow of Pippo's disgraceful break-down thus fell severely in more ways than one. The very reverend Canon Capucci was specially disgusted and annoyed at having been led into making himself the channel of such a recommendation in "high quarters." He bitterly reproached the hapless wax-chandler, spoke of the discredit thrown in the eyes of the ungodly, even on the newly established de-

votion, and on Santa Filomena herself; hinted at sacrilege having been committed in the selection of such a model for such a purpose; and would doubtless have bullied and frightened the poor man to a much greater extent had it not been that just about that time the "religion" of Santa Filomena received a far more serious blow and discouragement, which made it desirable for the saint's distinguished patrons to say as little about her as possible, only hoping that she might drop out of the popular mind as quietly and speedily as might be.

The extremely disagreeable and untoward facts of the case were these: of course the new "religion" could not be established—at least not with that credit and éclat which the saint's distinguished patroness was bent on conferring on her protégé, without the veritable body of the saint—the body she had worn when in the flesh. As well might a coroner think of holding his inquest with-

out the body he is to "sit upon!" Now the body of St. Filomena was in the catacombs at Rome—of course it was, as where else should a respectable saint's body be? So a petition was sent to the then occupant of St. Peter's seat from the distinguished lady at Florence, begging him, as guardian and administrator of all the saints' bodies in those inexhaustible magazines, to look out the body of St. Filomena and send it to Florence as a base for the proposed new devotion. Of course the holy father could not hesitate for an instant to grant so eminently right-thinking a request. St. Filomena was at once taken out of store and forwarded to Florence, with duly certified documents rehearsing the discovery of her in a tomb, authentically inscribed with her name. Of course no expense was spared in preparing a fittingly magnificent receptacle for the precious relic. But it so happened that while the saint was waiting to be thus decently housed,

one of those detestable intermeddling men of science, whose poking and prying is continually causing disturbance to religious minds in a manner which abundantly justifies the church and her right-thinking supporters in feeling that science must at all cost be put down—contrived in an unlucky hour to get access to the body. He examined the holy relics in the most irreverent manner, and discovered—and with that diabolically malicious hatred of religion which characterizes his class, took care to publish the discovery—that both the saint's thigh-bones belonged to the right leg, and had both belonged to individuals of the masculine gender.

What saint could make head against such a combination of unfortunate circumstances as this? Here was a misfortune which threw the *contretemps* of the scandal attaching to the picture into the shade. Of course St. Filomena and her "religion" had to be "withdrawn," and as little said about the

matter as might be. Had it not been for these circumstances Signor Laudadio would assuredly not so soon have heard the last from Canon Capucci of his unfortunate recommendation. As it was, the wealthy tradesman was fain to make his peace with his clerical patrons by coming down with a handsome sum in payment for a "novena," and a very handsome display of wax candles, three or four pounds in weight each, and duly carried off into the sacristy, after burning a quarter of an hour or so, to remedy as far as might be the mischief done.

On the fourth day after Pippo's disappearance, while the dismay, and the talk, and the recriminations were still at their height, the following letter was brought to his old comrade Tito Fanetti, the prosperous "regular-work-and-regular-pay" copyist.

"Signor Tito Fanetti,

"I will not call you my friend, for I

know that you would own that title no longer. Nevertheless, for the sake of former days, I think that you will do for me what I now request of you.

"I beg you to go to the *cereria* of Signor Laudadio Benincasa, and to see that gentleman, and his daughter Beppina, to whom I was engaged to be married on St. John's day last past.

"Say to them that the wrath of God has been upon me, and the curse incurred by my desertion of my sacred calling has overtaken me. Say that my sin found me out in time to leave open to me a door of possible redemption, and to save her from wedding with one vowed in the sight of God to celibacy.

"Of any part of my conduct towards her or towards any other, I say nothing, for henceforth I am dead to the world, and heedless of its pardon or its condemnation. I now live only to make my peace with God

and the Church, and to save, if it may be, my own soul. FILIPPO LONARI."

Honest Tito lost no time in executing the commission entrusted to him. It was not accomplished in terms quite so laconical and succinct as those in which it had been committed to him. Talk led to talk. Signor Laudadio had to be listened to while he moralized on the event after his own fashion. Pretty Beppina had also to be consoled.

Tito did both these good offices to the best of his ability.

He painted the fresco, too, in due time in the *loggia* behind the *cereria*.

The old wax-chandler, who had at first been led by mere chance to conceive the notion of thus entering himself on the list of fame, as a rival to the Albizzi and Pitti of old, had by degrees come to set his heart on the project.

"He was to have painted me a large picture in fresco too, in the *loggia* here in the garden," said the old man one day to Tito, when they had come to speak of Pippo, as people do of one who has been removed from them by death. "Well, well! Perhaps it is all for the best. I should have liked to see the loggia painted too," he added, after a pause. Then, after a still longer silence—"Did you ever paint in fresco, Signor Tito?"

"As a student, Signor Laudadio, I tried my hand on two or three walls. But of late years my work has been copying—humble work, it is true, sir; but I have lived by it, not altogether badly; and have paid my way, and owe no man anything. After all, Signor Laudadio, that is something; and I am content with my work."

"I believe you," returned the old trader, cordially. "Something! it is everything! Still, young men will be ambitious. High art is a very grand thing. Fame is pleasant,

—and sometimes very profitable also. Should you like now to try your fortune at a great picture, if you had the opportunity ?"

"I should be very glad to accept such a commission, certainly," said Tito, in a business-like way, speaking very distinctly, as he added, "providing it were paid at such a rate as to render my time so employed as valuable to me as if I were at work on my copies."

"Ah !—Ha !—Hum ! Very just; very true," rejoined the would-be Mecænas, with an air of being somewhat taken aback by Tito's very business-like view of the matter. Another long pause occurred; after which the old man continued, in a more hesitating manner; "Poor Pippo seemed to think that in such a case the work would be well paid by the opportunity of making a name."

"Perhaps he may have been right, my dear sir," said Tito, speaking clearly and frankly, and without the least embarrass-

ment; "but I in my position could not afford to pay so much for an opportunity. I would give, for such an opportunity, all the difference between the pay of a copyist and the pay of an original artist, doing my best for wages at the former rate. But more than this I could not give."

"Good, good! there is nothing to be said against that," replied the old man, adding, as he looked shrewdly and not unapprovingly at the young artist, "you speak like a man of business, Signor Tito."

"And I always try to act like one, my dear sir. And if you will pardon me for saying so much, my opinion is, that what is worth money, will rarely be got without paying money or money's worth for it in some shape. The artist who gives his time and work, most probably gives what is worth nothing."

"Perhaps you are right, Signor Tito," admitted the wax-chandler, whose trading

modes of thought were not averse to this practical mode of viewing matters; "perhaps you are right. But tell me now, if I *were* to make up my mind to be guilty of an extravagance for the sake of humouring a whim, what might a fresco covering the back of the *loggia* cost now,—paid for at the rate you were speaking of?"

"That would of course depend, Signor Laudadio, on the amount of time occupied on the work; and that would in some degree depend on the subject. What would be the nature of the subject you would think of putting on that wall?"

"Oh, I've got the subject all ready," returned Signor Laudadio briskly; "and in fact that is mainly the reason why I want to have the picture painted; for it is to commemorate an event that ought not to be forgotten."

"Ah! an historical picture," said the artist; "something from the history of Florence?"

"Yes, exactly; . . . at least an event in the history of the *cereria,* which is a part of Florence, you know."

"An event in the history of your *cereria,* Signor Laudadio!"

"Yes, sir; precisely so: and you will allow it is one which ought to be commemorated, . . and admirably adapted for artistic treatment. It happened in the time of my grandfather of happy memory. They were busy with a very large boiling of wax in the warehouse here; all hands were at the work; and my grandfather, rest his soul! was superintending, when all of a sudden they heard the bell, which gave notice that the most holy sacrament was passing in the street on its way to some poor dying sinner. Of course every man of them ran out to throw themselves on their knees as it passed, leaving the caldron to take care of itself, just at the critical moment. They could do no less, you know; and my grandfather, who

made a point of having none but really pious men in his employment, would have much preferred losing a caldron of wax, to having it said that the '*santissimo*' had passed his door without due respect having been shown it. Well, the wax boiled over, while the men were on their knees in the street; the whole caldron-full caught fire; and there was such a blaze as was never seen in the *cereria* before or since! I said the caldron was left to take care of itself. The Holy Virgin and the Saints forgive me!—It was left in better keeping than that of any earthly workman! When the men ran in,—not till the '*santissimo*' had passed, you understand,—the blaze was roaring up against the rafters of the roof, and everybody thought that the house must have been burned down. My grandfather and the men—three of them, that is—ran for buckets of water: and a difficult and dangerous job it was to get near enough to the flames to throw the water on

the raging fire. But the fourth man,—his name was Nanni Puliti; he had been recommended to my grandfather by his brother the sacristan at San Giovanni,—never stirred to get water, but threw himself on his knees in the doorway. Well, you know the great image of the Holy Virgin, on the wall opposite the entrance? while the others were singeing their beards with throwing water on the fire, Nanni, who knew a trick worth two of that, prayed to the Virgin. Would you believe it? the fire went out, and no great mischief was done! And Nanni told us afterwards that he had seen the Holy Virgin, as he looked at her across the flames, raise her arm, and stretch it out towards the caldron. And it was at that moment that the flames subsided. The other men wanted to lay claim to the merit of putting the fire out with the water. But my grandfather,—he was a pious man, was my grandfather, God rest his soul!—consulted his confessor on

the subject; and the miracle was recognized by many learned divines; and Nanni Puliti was known to be the man who had saved the *cereria.* And my grandfather made him a handsome present, and had his picture taken; and there it hangs in the warehouse to this day. Now there's a subject for a great historical picture!—historical, religious, and domestic at the same time. Of course the moment to choose would be that when the Virgin is stretching out her blessed arm towards the raging flames. The men would be throwing their buckets of water on them in vain. But I should like my grandfather to be represented as struck with astonishment and awe at the visible miraculous interposition. In fact it was seen by Nanni Puliti only. But such a license as that is always permissible to high art. Of course my portrait would be introduced in a kneeling position in one corner of the picture; and I would not object, if you wished it, to

your giving the likeness of the artist in the person of one of the men,—not in that of Nanni, of course; that would not be fair. There of course we must have his own portrait—it is but just to his memory, poor fellow! He was afterwards accused of robbing my grandfather, by carrying off goods from the warehouse secretly. And if it had not been that the chaplain at St. Giovanni told my grandfather that the accusation was a malicious falsehood, he would have lost his place. It is but right that we should do justice to his memory."

Signor Laudadio Beninca sa had been in a state of great enjoyment while making the foregoing unusually long oration. The sense of importance, dignity, patronizing, had gently flooded his heart, as the music of his own voice sounded in his ears, with a pleasure so subtle and so sweet, that it was quite beyond his strength to forego the scheme, which would enable him to enjoy much more

of the same sort. At the bottom of his heart, moreover, he appreciated and approved the honest painter's determination to be paid for his work; and was inclined to agree with him in the business-like opinion, that what is got for nothing is very apt to be worth exactly the same. So Tito Fanetti's very moderate terms were agreed to by him; and the great fresco was painted on the wall of the loggia in the garden of the *cereria*, where it may be seen to this day.

Of course the execution of this great work gave the worthy painter very ample opportunity for the performance of that other task, of consoling the charming Beppina. She was not intended by nature to wear the willow. Weave the wreath of it how she would, it was by no means becoming to her style of beauty. And she took to her consolation kindly; and in due time to her consoler also. Tito too, to own the truth, fond as he was of his art, laboured more willingly at

this latter work, than at the painting of the great wax-chandling miracle. The fact was that he scarcely appreciated, as he should have done, the grandeur of the subject; and it is to be feared that his irreverent wit may have led the laughter-loving Beppina into a little not altogether respectfully filial quizzing of the great design. Certain it is that the consolation, which his work in the loggia gave him such abundant opportunities of offering, very soon passed out of the lachrymose vein, and took the form of laughing altogether. And, in a word, by the time the great historical, religious, domestic fresco was finished, they had persuaded each other that by far the most consoling thing that could happen to either of them, was to take each other for better and worse, and do their best to laugh through life together. Old Laudadio was rather taken by surprise when Tito opened the proposal to him, and at first made some little difficulty. But he had be-

come accustomed to the artist's presence in the house, and had taken a liking to him after his not very expansive fashion. Then Beppina, looking the very picture of blooming health and plump jollity the while, assured him that her constitution could not stand being crossed in love, and that she should infallibly sink into the cold and silent tomb at a very early date if he opposed her wishes. So the paternal consent was given; and Beppina became Signora Fanetti, by the light of such a quantity of wax candles as had not illuminated a marriage ceremony in fair Florence for a long time.

Notwithstanding the change in his circumstances, honest Tito did not abandon his favourite maxim of regular work and regular pay. Perhaps his mid-day siesta may have lasted a little longer, and his return from the studio to his home been somewhat earlier in the afternoon, now that a wife was waiting for him there, than when the comfortable

life which he appreciated depended solely on the labour of his hands. For at the death of his father-in-law he found himself very comfortably off in the world;—not extravagantly rich, for old Laudadio left a considerable portion of his wealth to various sorts of "pious uses;"—but yet sufficiently so, to make the rapidly increasing family with which Beppina presented him a source of no such painful anxiety as its multiplication must have been, had no wax-chandlering profits existed.

As for Beppina, she would be a very handsome matron at the present day had she not become so unconscionably stout.

THE END.

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