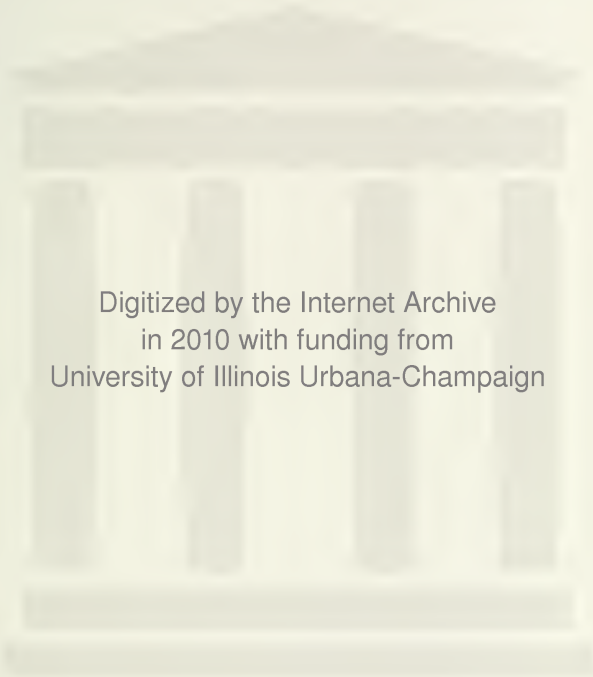


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THE DREAM NUMBERS.

THE
DREAM NUMBERS.

A Novel.

BY

T. ADOLPHUS TROLLOPE,
AUTHOR OF "LA BEATA," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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BOOK I.



ON THE BANKS OF THE SERCHIO.

THE DREAM NUMBERS.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE DOOR OF LUCCA CATHEDRAL.

IT was the 14th of September at Lucca, and it was mid-day; a fact which was proclaimed on that 14th of September at Lucca, not merely by the ordinary striking of the city clocks from the numerous belfries, but by a multifarious and merry, if not very melodious, clanging and clashing of bells of every kind of tone, for the 14th of September is the highest day of all the year at Lucca. Fortunate in so many other circumstances, Lucca is fortunate also in having its great annual holiday, the *festa* of the *Volto Santo*, at so festal a period of the year.

The pretty and bright little city, the prettiest and the brightest perhaps in all Italy, possesses a cathedral of very elegant Italian gothic, and an archbishop of great and special dignity in the Romish hierarchy to match. The whole chapter of this pretty and picturesque church is one specially privileged and dignified. The archbishop at his installation has tow steeped in spirits of wine burned on a gridiron before him, while the choir chants *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi* as the flame sinks, just for all the world as the Holy Father himself has at Rome. And every canon of the chapter wears a mitre, as if he were a bishop! What in the way of honour can a bishop and chapter want more?

And the pretty cathedral contains a treasure worthy of so dignified and exalted a clerical body. Indeed, it is probable that the possession of the treasure has led to the special exaltation of the clergy to whose guardianship so sacred a deposit is entrusted. This treasure is nothing less than the *Volto Santo*, or original impression of the features of the Saviour, which

remained, as the legend says, miraculously impressed on the handkerchief with which Saint Veronica piously covered that holy face. The relic is preserved in a little chapel or tabernacle raised in the nave of the cathedral. Though adorned by a statue of Saint Sebastian the masterpiece of Civitale, at the back of the altar, and by a series of golden lamps of immense value in front of it, the little chapel must be admitted to be an ugly building, wholly out of character with the elegant gothic architecture of the church, and a terrible eyesore in the midst of the otherwise perfect nave. To this little chapel, the holy of holies in the estimation of the Lucchese peasant, devotees constantly throng on every occasion that appears to them to require special aid or blessing from heaven. And on the 14th of September the crowd, in which each man, woman, and child is waiting for his turn to pass in front of the door of the tabernacle, fills the entire church with a dense mass. Of course no worshipper is so poor as to come empty-handed. Each drops his or her offering

of hardly-earned money in vases exposed for the purpose, as they pass in unceasing procession in front of the relic ; and the sum netted on that day is always large enough to be very well worth the acceptance of the most dignified chapter.

It was mid-day, and the crowd in the cathedral was at the thickest. The steps and broad stone terrace in front of the quaint and picturesque west entrance of the church were also thronged with people, almost entirely "*contadini* ;" that is to say, "country people," from the "*contado*," or surrounding villages and farms. The great western doors of the nave were opened wide, allowing the glowing summer light to stream into and far up the comparatively dark nave of the church. And two uninterrupted streams of men and women—in which, however, the latter sex was the most numerous—continued to pour into and out of the church in the quiet, sauntering, unpushing fashion of Italian peasants.

They were there to accomplish a high re-

ligious duty, and to do honour to the highest and holiest occasion of the year. But those whose experience of life is limited to Protestant countries, and who have in their memories the aspect and bearing of large gatherings of people assembled for some religious object of high and special import, will wholly fail to form for themselves out of such experience any correct idea of the scene which is here intended to be presented to the reader. The closest observer could not have detected in any single case among the throng the smallest mark either of spiritual exaltation, or of ascetic gloom, or of self-righteous sourness, or even of restrained and serious bearing. All were dressed in their best ; all were lazily good-humoured, and apparently thoroughly disposed to be pleased with everybody and everything about them. If the huge doors of the cathedral, through which the crowd kept lounging in and out, had been the entrance to a dancing saloon, or a tavern, the look and manner of the people could not have been other than it was.

All were dressed in their best, and their best was better than what would be the best of a similarly composed crowd in almost any other part of Europe. The Tuscans generally are an especially well-dressed people ; a larger portion of the general income of the working classes being expended probably on that department, than is the case among any other European population. And of all the Tuscans the Lucchesi, the inhabitants of Lucca and its environs, are noted for being the most well-to-do. Most of the leading Italian cities have an immemorial *sobriquet*, by which their most marked characteristic is popularly expressed. And "Lucca *la industriosa*" is the well-merited style and title of the bright little city, which preserved its mediæval republican independence the latest of all the Italian cities save Venice. Everything in the appearance of the city, and more still of the neighbouring country, declares very plainly to the most careless observer the right of Lucca to her special epithet. Nowhere do the people seem so prosperous, so well-to-do, so good-

looking. The best and honestest servants at Florence proverbially come from Lucca. Nowhere is the soil so highly cultivated as in the basin in which the city stands. Nowhere are the crops so heavy, the farm-houses and buildings so decent-looking, the weeds so few, the cattle so fat, the face of the land so green. The wheat raised in the farms around the city is so exceptionally fine that a large portion of it is exported as seed. They are a handsome race, these Lucchesi, open eyed, clear complexioned, clean limbed—much superior in all physical characteristics to the denizens of Florence. And there is a very high average of beauty among the women.

And now all this *contadina* population had thronged into the city; and all were decked out, as has been said, in their *festa* garments. A man might have been effectually smothered and buried alive in pearls, if after the manner of the old classical fable, all the rows that encircled all the brown, but well-formed, necks of peasant girls who that day passed those great

church doors had been thrown upon him in heaped-up contributions! And if all the gold in the huge, curiously worked ear-rings—very similar in taste to those which have been found in the tombs of the race who inhabited these hills and valleys two thousand years ago—were added to the heap, he would be greedy of gold, indeed, who would be content to carry it! There were many strikingly pretty faces, and fine, admirably built figures among the crowd—mostly of the Diana type, in which strength was blended with lightness—limbs the free movement of which was not devoid of grace, and whose clean, well-balanced stepping was not without a certain expression of dignity and pride. Very many of the girls wore nothing on their heads save a small gaily coloured handkerchief, folded into triangular form, and tied over the back part of their abundant hair, which was always carefully dressed and arranged, generally in large bands over the temples. These were dressed mostly in petticoats of blue or green serge, with bodices often of

scarlet, but more frequently of faultlessly white linen. But some, and these generally of the more well-to-do sort—the daughters of the comfortable farmers of the lowlands—wore silk, and had the very large hats of fine Leghorn straw, worn quite at the back of the head, which are commonly seen in the neighbourhood of Florence.

In one sense, the crowd about the church doors was, as has been said, quiet. That is to say there was no hustling or pushing, or hurry, or excitement. Every body moved slowly, lazily, and saunteringly. If anybody was at any moment prevented by the throng from advancing in the direction in which he purposed to go, he was quite as well contented to stand still, and wait patiently till the way was open. In all the crowd there was not a tone to be heard, or a gesture or a movement to be seen, which could argue irritation, hurry, ill-humour, or violence of any kind.

But in another sense the people were not quiet at all. There was an abundance of

chattering going on—more among the men than among the women—numerous greetings between country neighbours, and in some instances interchange of kindly words between the country folk and city friends.

“Oh, bravo! there is Signor Morini, on the look out for us, no doubt,” said a burly farmer to a very strikingly handsome girl, evidently his daughter, who was following in his wake through the crowd, coming out of the church.

The dress of the tall, stout, handsome old man in question was more like that of a “*fattore*,” as the class are called, who in Tuscany fill a position something between a bailiff and a land-steward, than a “*contadino*,” properly so called—that is to say a cultivator of the soil. He wore a square-cut, old-fashioned blue coat with brass buttons, a scarlet waistcoat with mother-of-pearl buttons, gray serge breeches, and blue worsted stockings, thick shoes high on the instep, and a white low-crowned hat with a very broad brim. And all these habiliments were in perfectly good condition. Nevertheless,

and despite his splendour of attire, Signor Giovanni Bartoli was in fact a *contadino*, though one of the wealthiest of his class. The land that he, and his father and grandfather before him, had cultivated was situated in the rich alluvial valley of the Serchio, some three or four miles from Lucca, in the direction of the world-celebrated Baths, which are situated fourteen miles from the city among the mountains. Signor Bartoli's land was at the foot of these, protected from the dangerous Serchio by lofty and well-kept dykes, which, while they prevented the unruly river from committing the devastations for which it had in Dante's day already a bad name, permitted its waters, fertilising in the extreme, when thus mastered and utilised, to be made serviceable at pleasure for the purposes of irrigation.

“Come, *figliuola mia!* there he is, on the top of the steps on the side of the fountain. We shall lose him again in the crowd, unless we get on!”

“It will not so much matter if we did. We

should find him at home quite time enough!" muttered the girl who was following him, with a little toss of her proud head. "I only hope that that insufferable bore, Signor Meo, is not with him!" she added, stepping forward however in obedience to her father's words.

I have said that the beauty to be observed among the girls of the Lucchese is mostly of the Diana type; and truly Regina Bartoli, the only child of Signor Giovanni Bartoli, might have sat to the most fastidious painter as a model for the huntress goddess herself. She was now in her nineteenth year exceedingly beautiful. An immense wealth of hair of the darkest shade of chestnut was braided above a noble forehead, higher and with a larger development than is ordinarily to be found among the peasant classes of any part of the peninsula. Her large frankly opened eyes of dark hazel were shaded by lashes of remarkable length, and very full, black, and strongly arched brows. But perhaps the mouth was the most notably lovely, as it was the most expressive

feature of her face ;—the mouth, which is always the most tell-tale feature, as to the moral qualities of which it is the expositor, in the case of the beautiful Regina Bartoli gave in clearly marked and very unmistakeably legible characters the outlines of her character. The remarkably short and admirably cut upper lip was very beautiful in its upward curl ;—but it was somewhat too evidently given to so curling. Add to this observation the poise and turn of the head on the noble column of the throat, and the general bearing of the person, and the least critical of observers would never have imagined that the character of Regina Bartoli was faulty on the score of too great a leaning to humility. If ever high pride was legible in outward semblance of a human being, it was so in that of the beautiful Regina. It was to be read in every passing expression of her face, in every turn of her head, in every step of her gait !

Nevertheless, the face was not one which would prepossess unfavourably anyone who saw

it. It was by no means an unamiable face. The pride was not a pride of a bad sort. Those who most complained of it were Regina's suitors; but then their name was legion; and they all agreed in swearing that Lucifer was a model of meekness in comparison to her. But there were categories of Regina's acquaintances, who though they hardly ventured to deny that the pride was there, did not find themselves hurt by it, and accordingly made no complaints of it. Her father could not altogether be reckoned among these, though his Regina was as the apple of his eye. For he did sometimes complain that she treated all the marriageable youths of their world in such a fashion that one would think she had made a vow to die an old maid. And then Regina would declare that as far as she could see, and for her part, it would be about the wisest thing she could do to make such a vow.

For all this Regina was a very general favourite. She was a favourite with the old men, whom her disdains did not hurt; she was a favourite

with the girls, whose lovers she did not make any attempt to captivate ; and she was a favourite with the matrons, who had seen her attendance on her mother, who had died when Regina was seventeen, after a very long and tedious illness. Since that time she had been the mistress of her father's house ; and in this capacity also, the matrons of the country side knew how to appreciate her excellence.

As for the young men, it would be difficult to say, that despite their complaints and reproaches, Regina was not a favourite with them too. For they would not leave her alone. Never was a girl who had had so many lovers ! And not all of them mere *contadini* either ! Otherwise it might have been said, as indeed for a long time it had been said, that the proud and pretty heiress of Ripalta farm (that was the name of the *podere* Giovanni Bartoli cultivated) could find no country lad good enough for her, because she was ambitious of marrying a citizen, and becoming a town lady. The accusation did not seem to be a baseless one for

a time. But latterly it had come to pass that a townsman, and he such an one, as most girls of a rank and position in life considerably superior to those of Regina Bartoli would have considered a most acceptable wooer, had placed himself on the list of Regina's suitors, and met with no better treatment from her, than she had accorded to his *contadino* predecessors.

What could the girl want ?

Regina's town-bred admirer was the son of Signor Giacomo Morini, the rich Lucca lawyer, and old acquaintance and business connection of Signor Bartoli. Young Bartolommeo Morini, the lawyer's son, had recently returned from completing his studies at the University of Pisa, to take his seat and desk in his father's office. At his father's house, on the occasion of one of Signor Bartoli's frequent visits to Lucca, and to his lawyer, the young graduate in law had seen Regina, and had forthwith fallen in love with her. It was a great condescension on the part of such a person to do so ; for what was Regina but a mere *contadina* after all ? But old Morini

knew all about Signore Bartoli's affairs ; knew to a *scudo* how many of them he had placed out at mortgage, and how many invested in the exceedingly lucrative but not altogether avowable commerce, conducted by one Andrea Simonetti in a little dark office in the "Via San Michele," in Lucca, which was much frequented by the poorer and less prosperous cultivators of the neighbouring country, who often left the worthy Signor Simonetti's den with still longer faces than they had worn on entering it. All this was well-known to discreet Signor Morini ; and upon the whole, he did not disapprove of his son's condescension in falling in love with this rich client's magnificent daughter, though she was but a *contadina*.

Signor Bartoli, on the other hand, though he would by no means have admitted that there was any condescension in the matter, was not displeased at the disposition manifested by the young lawyer. For he too had some knowledge of the old lawyer's affairs, though by no means so accurate a one as the lawyer had of his.

But now the gossips could no longer say that Regina Bartoli snubbed all her country admirers because she was ambitious of becoming a town lady. For here the object of such an ambition was offered her in a very desirable form ; and lo ! Regina was as scornful and untameable as ever.

It was this unhappy Bartolommeo Morini, of whom the scornful beauty said to her father, as they emerged from the dim cavern of the cathedral nave into the blazing noontide summer sunshine of the flagged steps, that she hoped that Signor Morini, whom her father had descried amid the crowd, was not accompanied by " that intolerable bore, his son."

Signor Morini was in truth accompanied by his son, as very speedily became apparent. They had not yet descried Bartoli and his daughter among the crowd ; but were standing a little out of the throng, looking out for them as they should come out of the church, at the northern end of the little flag-paved terrace at the top of the steps which, equal in width to

the whole west front of the cathedral, lead to the great entrance.

Regina and her father did not make their way to the spot where the lawyer and his son were standing, without encountering sundry greetings from acquaintances, mostly young men of their neighbourhood in the country, to which old Bartoli for the most part replied by a nod and a word of some sort, and Regina by a silent and generally very haughty and slight bend of her stately neck.

“*Eccoci ! Eccoci !* Here we are !” exclaimed Lawyer Morini hurrying forward, as soon as he caught sight of the farmer and his daughter, “here we are ! We have been on the look out for you for the last quarter of an hour ! We thought we should be sure to miss you if we came into the church. Your humble servant, Signorina Regina !”

Signor Morini, the lawyer, was a brisk little man, with black eyes, black stiff hair brushed hog’s-mane fashion, black beard, black garments, and a shrewd weasel-like face. His son, who

was by his side, was of far more agreeable exterior ; but he was without any of his father's briskness of manner. He was a tall and not ill-looking stripling, with curling chestnut hair, and a handsome beard to match, dressed in gay colours and in the height of Lucca fashion. The expression of his face was one of simple vacancy, lighted up by occasional pallid gleams of self-complacency.

“Certainly, you would have missed us in the church !” replied the farmer ; “as well look for one black bean in a field of white beans, as for a man in that crowd. There's all the world in the church, I think. The shop will make a good thing of it this year, or the devil is in it !”

La Bottega, the shop, was Signor Bartoli's irreverent mode of designating the cathedral clergy, and indicated that his opinions and feelings with regard to the Church were those which have long been prevalent in the towns of Italy, but which are only beginning to be general among Signor Bartoli's class in the country ; opinions, however, which did not

operate to prevent him from visiting the metropolitan church on the high festival of the *Volto Santo* as his fathers had for many generations done before him, or his daughter from dropping a very handsome donation into the yawning slit of the great *tronc* in front of the shrine.

“The shop will make a *very* good thing of it, *because* the devil *is* in it!” returned the lawyer with a laugh, and a “what-would-you-have” grimace and shrug. “Come along! it is past mid-day, and our *colazione* will be waiting for us. My wife will think that the Signorina Regina’s devotions have been protracted.”

“Devotions! Bah! *Altro che devozioni!* She put the price of a couple of fat capons into the *tronc*, I know! That is the main part of the devotions! But what would you have? Women will be women!” said the farmer, the main gist of whose speech was to boast of the handsomeness of his contribution to the object he affected to despise.

“Anyway, to your worship the price of a dozen of fat capons, more or less, makes very

little difference!" said the lawyer, who well understood the farmer's purse-proud humour; "but to think of all the money those black cattle get out of poor devils, who have more than enough to do to pay their way in the world honestly! I call it robbery!"

Thus discoursing the two seniors turned to descend the steps of the church, and stroll slowly towards the lawyer's house; where, according to annual custom, Signor Bartoli and his daughter were to eat their midday meal on that day. Their direct way would have led them across the great square in front of the huge palace, once the residence of the Dukes of Lucca, now one of the forty or fifty useless palaces of the King of Italy. But to cross this open space in the noon-tide blaze of the mid-September sun was not to be thought of by any Italian; especially as by passing through the church of the Baptistery, which stands a little to the north-west of the cathedral, and then threading one or two shady back lanes, they were enabled to reach the *piazza* of San Michele,

in the neighbourhood of which was the dwelling of Signor Morini, almost without encountering a ray of sunshine.

The young people were left to follow, as Regina had presciently known would be the case, if Signor Bartolommeo were with his father, when she had expressed the hope that that fate was not in store for her.

“The holiday is a holiday indeed, signorina, that brings you into town!” said Meo gallantly, executing a very elaborate bow as he spoke.

“For my part there is nothing I hate so much as coming into the city!” said Regina, very ungraciously.

“Your place is so beautiful! And the heat is very oppressive! May I venture to offer you my arm, signorina!”

“I prefer walking alone!” said Regina, with a look that might have frozen an army of more appreciative swains. In fact the offer was by no means *convenable* in the eyes of a country-bred damsel; and even among citizens savoured somewhat of new-fangled manners.

Meo was obliged to content himself with walking by her side therefore, while she took care to keep as close behind her father and his as possible.

“Did you not find it intolerably hot in the church?” he asked.

“I did not go there for pleasure! One must attend one’s religious duties; at least we country folk choose to do so. You preferred to remain outside, I suppose!” returned Regina.

“You went to worship the *Volto Santo*; I knew that if I waited at the door, my *Volto Santo* would come out to me!” said the University-bred youth with irreverent gallantry, looking with a glance of intense admiration into his companion’s face as he spoke.

What he saw there might have sufficed to teach him, if he had had the sense to read it, that he was not taking the right way to make himself agreeable to the object of his admiration. The short and lovely upper lip was curled into an eloquent expression of the most intense scorn and disgust. The proud head was raised

a little more proudly, and the face was yet a little more turned away from him than it had been before. But this was all the notice she condescended to take of his words. She would not, if she could help it, let him perceive that she had comprehended his meaning. It was disgusting to her to be complimented on her beauty by him. And though Regina was not a specially devout Catholic—but few Italians of any class or age, are so in these days ;—yet she had sufficient reverence for sacred things and sacred names, and sufficient natural good taste to make the flippant and vulgar irreverence of his words exceedingly distateful to her.

“I cannot tell you, Signorina Regina,” he resumed, after walking some distance in silence, “how anxiously I have been looking forward to this holiday, knowing that you would be sure to come in, and to visit us as usual!”

Regina thought that her father and Signor Morini walked slower and slower. It seemed as if the walk to the lawyer’s house would never come to an end! And she was in purgatory as

long as it lasted! Being constrained thus to listen to whatever Signor Meo chose to say to her made him more hateful to her than ever, and irritated her into rudeness.

“I have no choice but to accompany my father where he chooses to take me,” she said, speaking with the extremities of her all but closed lips. “Not that I am not grateful to your mother for her civility. She has always been very kind to me,” she added, with a little compunction for the extreme rudeness of her previous words.

“You know that it is a *festa* for us all in our house when you enter it, Signorina Regina. And I think you know,” he added, dropping his voice almost to a whisper, “that it is so to me more than to all the others.”

“I am sure I am ready enough to enter it now,” retorted Regina; “for I am very tired of my walk, and I wish it was at an end.”

“It will be in a minute, worse luck for me,” rejoined Meo; “see, here is the Piazza di San Michele, we are close at home. Will you not

say one kind word to me, Regina, before our walk is at an end?"

But Regina was gazing up at the fourfold lines of quaintly ornamented arches and statues, which tier above tier form the singular and picturesque west front of the Church of San Michele, in the *piazza* of the same name, which they were crossing, and pretended not to hear what her unwelcome suitor was pouring into her unwilling ear. And in the next minute, all four of them were standing at the lawyer's door, while he drew from his pocket a key with wards at both ends of it, with which he proceeded to open the door, by applying either end of it to two different locks in succession.

CHAPTER II.

SIGNOR MORINI'S DINNER PARTY.

HOUSE-RENT is cheap in Lucca. Signor Morini was a warm man ; and he therefore indulged in the comfort and ostentation of occupying the entirety of a small house. Having thus space enough, he had his *studio*, or office, as we should say, under the same roof with his dwelling, contrary to the more usual practice of men of his profession in Tuscany. The *studio* occupied three rooms on the ground floor on the right of the entrance door. On the left of this, and of the large roomy hall and staircase, the front room was occupied by a miscellaneous litter of objects, which would have sufficed at once to proclaim the dwelling to be an Italian and a Tuscan one to all such as had any knowledge of the

habits of the country. In one corner might be seen a huge heap of flasks, the thin and extremely fragile glass bulbs of which were duly protected by their "breeching" (technical term) of flag-rushes.

Wine, oil, water, vinegar, milk, and indeed any other liquid article of ordinary domestic use is habitually stored for keeping, or placed for present use, in these ubiquitous flasks of all work.

In another corner was a sack of flour, a saddle on the floor by the side of it, and close to that one of the tall brass Tuscan lamps of elegant and suggestively picturesque form, a legacy, as regards the peculiar fashion of them, from the old, pre-historic Etruscan civilisation. Then a litter of the great golden-hued ears of the maize, or "gran' Turco," as it is called in Tuscany; and a large quantity of the long, dried leaves of the same plant tied up in a sheet by the four corners, and reserved for the stuffing of paillasses for the beds.

Behind this characteristically garnished room was the kitchen, and other offices. The family dwelt exclusively on the first floor; and the

second, half unfurnished and filled with an accumulation of lumber, sufficed for servants' bedrooms in the other half.

La Signora Morini, who had run out as soon as she had heard her husband's key in the door, was standing on the first landing-place of the open staircase to welcome her expected guests as they entered.

She was a large, fair, comely woman, with a good-humoured and pleasing expression of kindness on her broad, fat face. She was dressed in a very handsome black silk dress, with a tippet—or whatever may be the more appropriate and modern name of the garment—of fine white lace, the product of no machinery, however cunningly devised, but of yet cunninger human fingers. On her large broad head she wore a towering and wonderful structure of lace and ribbons. For was it not the *festa* of the “*Volto Santo?*” And did it not become every Lucchese to do honour to the day and the miracle by the production of the very best bibs and tuckers? Over her handsome silk dress

Signora Morini had a coarse white linen apron, intended to protect its splendour during the ante-company hours of domestic privacy; but which, with genuine Tuscan simplicity, she had never thought of stopping to remove before running out in a hurry to speak to her country visitors the hearty welcome which she so genuinely meant.

The Italians of the upper classes are rarely hospitable in their city lives. They are more so in the country. And the traditional habits of life which have caused this disposition have no doubt arisen from the fact that in the cities of Italy almost all amusement, especially all evening amusement, is of a public and non-domestic character. The middle classes, corresponding with what we should call the lower half of the middle class, is generally more disposed to hospitality. But among them the hospitality which is most commonly practised consists not in mutual visiting between city neighbours and friends, but in receiving friends and connections from the country.

There is a good deal of rivalry and ostentation in intercourse of this sort ; the remaining result of the old antithesis, once so strongly marked in Italy, between the inhabitants of the country and the denizens of the cities. The prevailing feeling which prompts this sort of show-off is not, "See how grand and great I, A. B., am !"—but, "See how superior our city mode of life is to what you country folks are used so !"

And then there is much less of offensive vulgarity in Italian ostentation than in that of some other peoples. There is a frank, naïve, one might almost say childish, simplicity and openness about it that well nigh saves it from offence. The rich man delights in showing off his own magnificence ; and the poor man delights in looking at it, with a pleasure as unalloyed by any feeling of shame at his own poverty as the pleasure of the gallery-gods at a theatre is in gazing at stage magnificence. In the great and intensely Italian gala show, which is called a *corso*, the owner of splendid carriages

and horses and liveries makes the utmost display of them ; while next him in the line of equipages shall be seen some utterly wretched and shabby shandridan with its one meagre steed, and rusty harness, the masters of which for the day are enjoying the *Corso* and its splendours to the very full as much as *Dives* in his gilded coach, without the faintest shadow of a thought of shame at their own shabbiness, or perception of the incongruity of their own appearance cheek by jowl with their neighbour's wealth. There are many other things which, to the disadvantage of the Italian moral nature, are felt by Italians to be misfortunes without being, as our sterner moral code declares them to be, *disgraces*. And the same is true from the Italian point of view more advantageously of poverty. It is a no whit lesser evil than in our own estimation. But it is not felt to be disgraceful. The rich man displays his beautiful things for the gratification of the poor man's eye, not with either the view to, or the result of, crushing or depressing him.

There was much of ostentation in all that went

to the gala-day reception of their country friends by the Morini family. But it was of the simple sort. It was understood and admitted by both parties to be ostentation, and was admired and approved of as such. Signora Morini's grand silk gown, and fine lace, and magnificent cap were all assumed for ostentation, and most assuredly not for the good dame's own personal comfort. And at the fitting moment they would be displayed in all their unveiled splendour. But in the mean time there was no feeling that prompted her to dissemble the fact that these superb possessions were to be carefully guarded and preserved as such. And the fact that she was seen by her visitors with a coarse linen apron over her spotless silk dress, had no tendency whatever to produce annoyance on her part, or any depreciatory observations on theirs.

“Here you are at last, the saints be praised!” she cried, from her place on the first landing-floor of the stairs, as soon as they entered the hall door, “better late than never!”

Welcome Signor Giovanni! Welcome S'ora Regina! *Come sei bella! Ma come!* You are like the Campanile di Giotto! Every time one sees you, you seem more beautiful than the last time! My faith it is true! I wanted Meo at home this morning! We had friends here! How I begged him to stay! But lord! I might as well have spoken to the wind! He must needs be off with Morini to the Duomo to catch the first sight of somebody. And I don't wonder at him! Come along! Come up, Signor Giovanni!"

And the good dame turned to lead the way into her sitting-room, where three or four other guests had already assembled.

In the first place there was Signora Marta Monaldi, the widow of a well-to-do wheelwright from the same part of the country as the Bartolis. Signor Monaldi had died in the prime of life only four or five months before that 14th of September, and his widow was scrupulously arrayed according to the proprieties of her widowhood. The widow Marta had been a

noted beauty, and still, at a year or two short of forty, was a buxom dame of no inconsiderable attractions,—attractions which were universally felt to be very considerable indeed, when it was known that she was the entire heiress of her late husband's very prosperous business, and no insignificant amount of savings. Of course it was felt that such a widow must needs require a protector, and that she would probably not be insensible to the expediency of selecting some fortunate man among the many who were sure to be candidates for such promotion as the successor to poor Giuseppe Monaldi, and the manager of a business, which evidently was not such as could be efficiently conducted by a woman. As far as finding somebody to act for her in this latter capacity, the widow had already bestirred herself, and had asked her friends to assist her. And it was very generally felt that the person chosen for this purpose, if not absolutely disqualified, would have long odds in his favour as against any other candidate for the great prize of the widow's hand. The selec-

tion of a manager of the wheelwright's business of Marta Monaldi, widow of Sponda Lunga, was therefore a matter of greater interest in the world than it would have been under other circumstances.

There was also in Signor Morini's sitting-room a young man of some five-and-twenty, or perhaps thirty, years of age, who would have been called very good-looking by those of the other sex, who have no gift of judging of looks, save by the material form and colour of them ; but who would probably have been deemed singularly ill-looking by such as were endowed with the faculty of more æsthetic perceptions. This was Signor Andrea Simonetti, the son of that capitalist of the same name, who has been already mentioned as carrying on an industry of a nature more lucrative than loudly avowable, in a certain shady back street not far from the *piazza* of San Michele, in the industrious city of Lucca ; and to whom a portion of the hoarded *scudi* of Signor Bartoli had been entrusted for investment. There is no townlet of Italy so

small as not to possess, unhappily, a providence for the unfortunate, of the class to which Signor Andrea Simonetti the elder belonged. The public, ever ungrateful, call these benefactors "strozzini." Now the verb *strozzare*, which is Italian of the purest Della Cruscan mintage, signifies to throttle, or cut the throat. Nevertheless, so many persons betake themselves to these operators to have their throats cut, that the business is generally a very lucrative one.

Now Signor Andrea Simonetti the elder, the "strozzino"—not that anybody save an altogether ruined and desperate client would ever have dreamed of calling him such to his face—was an old client and business connection of Lawyer Morini. Such a friendship as that which existed between the lawyer and Signor Simonetti is always necessary to the members of the latter's profession. And how can it be that those who most constantly and habitually appeal to the laws of their country, and most carefully square their actions by them, can be otherwise than

the best citizens! Signor Morini and Signor Simonetti were accordingly very old and very close friends.

To this friendship had been due the introduction of Signor Andrea Simonetti the younger to the widow Monaldi. It had somehow or other never occurred to the worthy lawyer to bring these two friends of his together during the lifetime of Signor Monaldi. It was not at all likely that the thriving wheelwright would have wished in any way for the acquaintance of Signor Andrea Simonetti, either father or son. Nor had the considerate lawyer seen any reason for obtruding the elder gentleman on the widow's notice. But *very* shortly after the wheelwright's death he had found an opportunity of making the younger Simonetti acquainted with his widow. He had not done so till he had maturely considered the expediency of submitting his own son to the widow's favourable notice. But in the first place Monaldi's widow was, though no despicable prize, considerably less worth having than Bartoli's

daughter, supposing both ladies to be weighed in the scales, which the lawyer was most capable of using for the purpose of estimating their respective merits. And in the second place, Meo, his son, would not hear of any such substitution in the object of pursuit proposed to him. His admiration for the beautiful Regina was a very sincere one. He was, indeed, genuinely in love with her, with an infatuation that was capable of going to the extent of preferring her, even if she had been somewhat the less wealthy of the two.

And under these circumstances Morini had taken the earliest opportunity of starting young Simonetti as his candidate for the widow's hand; and as a preliminary to that promotion, for the managership of her business.

The latter object of ambition had been stated to the lady in plain terms; and the lawyer had backed the young man's proposition with his warmest recommendation. The widow, however, who had a head of her own, had asked for a little time to think of the matter. And her

thinking, together with the results of certain inquiries, which she had quietly made, and of counsel which she had quietly asked in a quarter to which ladies in her position are apt to apply, both in catholic and in protestant countries, had not been favourable to the lawyer's recommendation. Nevertheless, like a true Italian, she had not declared her determination in an open and decided manner. Perhaps she had not altogether and definitively formed it. Possibly the handsome scampish-looking son of the usurer recommended himself to the woman, more favourably than the proposal of managership recommended itself to the widow wheelwright. Perhaps Marta Monaldi felt that she was a woman, while she could not forget that she was a wheelwright. At all events, she met the aspirant to her favour very graciously at the lawyer's house on the occasion in question; and behaved to him with marked kindness, though she had come thither with the full intention of letting it be known that she had in fact made an arrangement, which precluded any

further thought of Simonetti's becoming her business manager.

"Well!" said the mistress of the house, unable to refrain for an instant from the pleasure of telling the news on a subject of so much general interest to the new comers, "what do you think? The Signora Marta has found a manager for her business!"

"Who is it?"

"Ah! that is what I would give you a hundred guesses to guess in, and you would be as far as ever from the mark!"

"I don't see why you should make such a wonder of it," said the pretty widow, casting her eyes down demurely; "he is a connection of my own. And blood is thicker than water, you know, any way!"

"Connection!" retorted her friend. "Why you knew nothing about him, and had never heard of him a couple of months ago!"

"Heard of him! Yes, Signora Maria,"—that was the name of the lawyer's wife,—“I had *heard* of him, as far as that goes!" pleaded the

widow. "If I had never heard of my cousin's husband, how could I have thought of making inquiry for what I wanted there? Assunta Benincasa was my mother's sister's child; and she was Francesco Caroli's first wife. She died, poor thing—heigho!" (the widow paused, and passed her pocket-handkerchief before her eyes. It was a passing acknowledgment of the universal monarchy of king Death, which was felt to be no more than decent in a widow not yet out of her weeds)—"she died, and her husband—he was as good a husband to her as ever man was—married again, and had a son by his second wife. That all happened when I was quite a child; for my cousin Assunta was a good bit older than I was. But I had always heard of Francesco Caroli from time to time, and so I just thought I would ask him if he knew of anybody who was likely to suit me. That is all about it."

That was not, however, *quite* all about it. And the widow had had some little hints to go upon, beyond what she here thought proper to

confess. However, all that she had said was the truth, though it was not quite the whole truth.

“Well!” said Signor Morini, who had left home to go and look after the Bartolis at the Duomo before the widow had arrived, and who had therefore not heard the news; “well, and so, as I gather, your cousin by marriage was able to recommend you a person likely to suit?”

“Well, I hope so!” said the widow, again dropping her handsome eyes to the floor with a very demure look. “Signor Francesco has proposed to me that his own son should come and look after the business for me!”

“His son!” cried the lawyer, pursing up his lips into the shape of a whistling “Whew!”

“Well!” put in old Bartoli, “since he is her own relation! what better could Signora Marta do? Blood is thicker than water, as she says!”

“Not my own *relation!*” replied the widow with rather marked promptitude and decision; “my *connection!*—the son of my cousin’s

husband by a second wife! There is no relationship between us—between me and the young man, that is!”

“Well! your connection then!” returned Bartoli; “so as he belongs to people you know something of, and can have some hold on, that is the main point, I take it! I suppose he is not a *very* young man—not a mere boy?” continued the farmer.

“Oh dear no! not a very young man by any means—not what I call a *very* young man!” replied the widow, with a slight increase of colour in the smooth fair cheeks of her plump and comely face; “Carlo Caroli must be seven-and-twenty, if he is a day!”

“Seven-and-twenty! Humph!” rejoined Bartoli; “I call that a young man! But then we think of such things differently at your time of life and mine, Signora Marta, don't we? Well, we'll hope he is one of them that comes to steadiness early!”

“And where is this young man to come from?” asked the lawyer, swallowing and con-

cealing his vexation as well as he could ; “ nowhere hereabouts, I think ; or else I should hardly have failed to hear of it. Carlo Caroli ! I do not remember ever to have heard of the name.”

“ I believe that Signor Caroli came from the Val d’ Elsa,” returned the widow. “ But when my cousin died, he went to settle at Uzzano, where his present wife has some property.”

“ Uzzano ! Where is that ? Let me see— Uzzano. That is somewhere in the Valdinievole, isn’t it ? ” said the lawyer.

“ Yes, Signor Giacomo ; Uzzano is in the Valdinievole, above Pescia,” said the widow. “ I never was there ! ” she added rather hastily ; “ and maybe I should never have heard of the place, if my cousin by marriage had not settled there.”

“ I know the place very well ! ” cried Signor Bartoli ; “ I have been there before now— years ago. And a queer-looking place it is. Such a tumble-down old ramshackle nest I never saw ! . . . stuck up on a rock at the top of

the mountain, with walls half-tumbled down, and an old castle three-quarters tumbled down, and half the houses in the place pretty nigh as bad. Howsomever, there are some good ones ; let's hope your cousin's is one of them, Signora Marta ; and some famous chestnut woods—as fine trees as you would wish to see—round about. But lord ! such a place to get to ! ”

“ Uzzano ! Uzzano ! I have got the name of the place in my head ! ” said the lawyer. “ I think I have heard of it some time or other. And when is this young man from Uzzano, who is a connection but no relation, to make his appearance at Sponda Lunga, Signora Marta ? ”

“ Well, Signor Morini, almost directly, I believe. What was the use of waiting about it, when the matter was once settled ? ” said the widow, with a manner that seemed to betray a consciousness that the circumstances needed to be excused—for which there was no apparent occasion.

“ Nay ! what use indeed, when the matter was as you say once settled, ” coincided the

lawyer. "I hope it may turn out for the best, that is all."

A neat-looking servant girl here opened a door communicating with an adjoining room.

"Now, *Signori!* *In tavola!* *In tavola!*" cried the host, rising and motioning his guests towards the dining-room, but without giving his arm to either of the ladies present.

It was nearly one o'clock when they sat down to dinner, and it was past three when the dessert and the *vin santo* was reached. *All* the intervening time had not absolutely been spent in eating. For there were longer pauses between one portion of the feast and another than is usually the case with us. But the talking had been incessant, and the quantity of food placed upon the table, and done ample justice to by the company, was enormous. For was it not the festival of the *Volto Santo*? At last the ladies went to sit at the windows and look out into the street, while the gentlemen took their coffee.

Regina had of course been placed next to

Meo Morini at dinner. She knew very well before-hand that a couple of hours so passed would have to be endured ; and she would willingly have given up the holiday and its visit to the city for the sake of escaping from those hours, had the refusal to accompany her father to Lucca on the festival of the *Volto Santo* been a thing at all possible to be thought of. Poor Meo laboured hard to put his opportunity to the best profit possible, and did his utmost to make himself as agreeable to the proud beauty as he could,—with no other notable result than that of causing her to abominate him at the end of the time somewhat worse than she had done at the beginning of it. Nevertheless, she saw him on this occasion to great and unwonted advantage. For the comparison between him and Signor Andrea Simonetti was all in his favour. So much so, that had it not been for the consciousness that he was making love to her, she would have judged him to be a very tolerably harmless bore in comparison with that far more obnoxious individual.

Indeed the efforts of the disgustingly handsome young usurer to captivate the widow might have afforded a very rich source of amusement to an older and more cynically-minded observer than Regina. But she had too much of the pride of sex, and, like most of her countrymen, too little of the sense of humour, to find much amusement in what outraged her sense of womanly dignity and propriety. The widow, to do her justice, was in nowise disposed to listen to the blandishments of Signor Andrea, despite his snaky-looking, bright, black eyes, brilliant teeth, and beautifully trimmed black beard and moustache. But she was not at all well skilled in repulsing them, especially anxious, as she very evidently was, not to be rude, or to risk giving offence, either to the young man himself, or to her host, in doing so. She was a mild, plump, gentle-eyed, and gentle-voiced, little woman. And what with her desire to be conciliatory to everybody, and what with a way she had—whether it had, like Dogberry's reading and writing, come by nature ;

or whether it was the result of habit, so inveterate that it had become second nature, I can't say—a way of turning up and down, and right and left, the gentle, timid glances of her fine, large, liquid, hazel eyes, with an expression that seemed to have an immense deal in it, it would have been possible for a less coarsely obtuse and brazenly self-confident nature than that of the usurer's son to be deceived as to the sentiments with which she listened to his vulgarly assiduous love-making.

But the comedy of all this was lost upon Regina. The odiousness of it only was apparent to her. It made her sick to think that it was within the bounds of possibility that similarly loathsome incense might be offered to her. And she felt that she should be in danger of stabbing the man who should venture to do so.

It was clear, as the young usurer perceived, that the scheme of the managership of the wheelwright business—which he would, indeed, never have dreamed of undertaking, save as a

means of approach to the rich widow—was out of the question. But it did not at all follow that the main object must therefore be abandoned. It was most probable that the widow had engaged this apparently unseen connection of hers simply and truly because she had reason to think that it would be well for her business interests to do so. The person in question might very probably be the last man in the world to turn out a rival in her affections. And Signor Andrea, who was not at all disposed to fear a rival, even if the new comer should turn out to be such, had no thoughts of giving up the game.

“I am so glad,” he whispered, leaning over her with a hideous leer, till his lips were within an inch of her ear—“I *am* so glad that you have found somebody to take the bother of the business off your hands.”

“*Eh! gia! che vuole!*” said the widow, with a gently-bosom-heaving sigh, and casting a pensive glance beneath her long silken lashes at a morsel of anchovy and butter on her plate,

which in truth was the object of all her immediate thoughts.

“Such bores are not fitted for such as you! To think of such eyes as those poring over a ledger! or those white little hands blotting themselves with ink in a counting-house! *Vi pare?* can it be thought of? Ah, *bellissima Signora*, when to the features of an angel a woman joins the heart of one, the business of angels is the only one fitted for her, and that is love! Is it not so, lovely Signora Marta? Let me help you to the turkey” (which was just then carried round by the servant); “those fairy little hands of yours cannot well manage it!”

“*Troppo buono*, Signore! I will take a sausage with it, if you please,” said the widow, with a beaming look of gushing tenderness.

“Of course! They are made on Signor Morini's own farm. Ah, *bella Signora* how the man would be to be envied whose blessed lot it should be always so to wait on you, and care for you!”

The widow lifted her large eyes to the ceiling with a glance that a painter might have envied for a Saint Cecilia, as she replied, "I think that I should get tired of sausages *every day*."

"But not of the loving care, which would be ever on the watch to prevent your tiring of anything,—not of love, lovely Marta!" (he thought that he might venture to drop the Signora under cover of the natural enthusiasm proper to the sentiment) "you would never tire of love,—such love as one heart that I know of could offer!"

"*Eh, che mi canzona! Vi pare?* How can you think of such things! All that is over for me in this life! What lovely salad! It is a pleasure to look at it. I think I will like a little salad, if you please, Signor Andrea!" returned the lady, with an *œillade* that might have burned a hole in the cuirassed bosom of a grenadier.

And all this did not prevent the placid widow from making a very good dinner, and enjoying it very much; while the much more

timid proceedings of the young Pisan graduate annoyed the more sensitive Regina to a degree that made her feel it a great relief when the dinner at length came to a conclusion.

Shortly afterwards, Signor Bartoli, resisting all the efforts of his host to induce him to prolong his visit, so as to allow his daughter to join Signora Morini and the widow Monaldi in their *passeggiata*, took his leave ; and seeking his gig at the stables where he had left it in the morning, set out with Regina by his side for Ripalta.

CHAPTER III.

A WALK AND A DRIVE.

“I DO think neighbour Bartoli might have been in a little less hurry to get back to the farm, and have allowed Regina to come to the *passeggiata* with us ; and to-day the *Volto Santo*, too, of all days in the year !” said Signora Morini, as soon as the farmer and his daughter had taken their departure.

“Oh . . . Bartoli ! What would you have ? Bartoli has got the *scudi*,—plenty of them ! But a *contadino* is always a *contadino*. Go to church—stare at the crowd—eat enough for half-a-dozen, and then go home to sleep—that is a *contadino’s* notion of a festa !” returned the lawyer.

“That is all very well ! One understands it !

I do not pretend that a *contadino* should turn himself into a townsman. But for the sake of Regina he might have stayed long enough for her to go to the *passeggiata*," returned his wife, who would have liked to exhibit the wealthy farmer's beautiful daughter under her wing, and escorted by her son Meo, and had looked forward to the *passeggiata* of the afternoon to be made under these circumstances.

"Bartoli would have stayed fast enough, if Regina had asked him!" said Meo, bitterly. "But she had no mind for it. I think she gets prouder and prouder every time I see her! I suppose we are not grand enough for her ladyship. I wonder whether there is anybody that she does care for?"

"Nobody in the world, I will answer for it, Meo!" said a young man, a clerk of Signor Morini's, who had been invited to make up the dinner party to the symmetrical number of eight. He was a very smart and very good-looking youngster, and had himself, once upon a time, ventured to lift his eyes to the beautiful

Regina, and been unmercifully snubbed for his pains. Ladislao Doni his name was, commonly called Lao.

“Nobody in the world! Regina has not got it in her to care for anybody but herself! I never knew one like her for coldness and up-pishness! And I don’t see what she has to be so uncommon proud of.”

“Oh, come, Lao! That won’t do neither!” said Meo, indignantly; “what she’s got to be proud of! Why, of being out and away the finest girl anywhere between here and Florence. There is no denying *that*, any way.”

“So she is, Meo, my son! and them as can’t see it have not got eyes in their head!” said his mother.

“Oh! she is very handsome, certainly!” said Widow Monaldi, “it can’t be gainsaid. She is just lovely! All the men say she is so proud. *I* don’t see it. She is never proud to me. I know when my poor dear man lay dying, one dark rainy night, when we wanted to get the doctor out from Lucca special—the poor fellow was

suffering and tossing, and going on in such a way we did not know what to do with him, and there was nobody to send, for they'd all gone here and there, one this way and t'other that ; and we did not know whatever to do, Regina takes an umbrella and goes off afoot to Lucca in the rain and the dark, and brings the doctor out with her. 'Such a night as it was, too ! Now that ain't proud, you know !'

"Who knows what game she was up to, making an excuse to be off to the city in the dark hours, that way ?" said young Simonetti, with a loathsome sneer on his handsome face.

But he was put down at once by a chorus of indignant protestations from Signora Morini, Meo, and the widow. Even Lao Doni, the snubbed one, essayed to recover the mistake he had made by his previous attempt at disparagement, by declaring that it was too bad to say such a word as that of a girl of whom all the world knew that, if she was as proud as Lucifer, she was at least as good as any saint in the calendar !

"And I don't know a more dangerous job

that anybody could be sent on than to hint any such thing as that to old Bartoli!" said the lawyer; "*I* would not do it for more crowns than I will say."

"*I* don't want to say anything against the girl! I see nothing in her any way!" said the usurer's son, unabashed by the storm of disapproval he had raised. "Only," he whispered into the widow's ear, with a tender glance, "only it provokes me to hear such a chit spoken of as a none-such, by people who have at the very time before their eyes something really first-rate in the way of beauty! I should like to know what that girl has of either face or figure comparable to those I am now looking at!"

The widow was certainly a woman of considerable attractions, and may be fairly supposed to have been sufficiently aware of the fact. But she knew that she had not beauty that could be compared with that of Regina Bartoli, in the primest flower of her youth. She knew also that the man who addressed her was an ill-con-

ditioned, worthless fellow, whose admiration, even if it had been genuine, was not worth having by any woman. She knew that the flattery he was addressing to her was motivated solely by the reputation of the *scudi* which her husband had left her. And she knew, too, perfectly well, that whatever might be the ultimate destiny of these *scudi*, no one of them, as long as she possessed the use of her senses, would go to the enriching of Signor Andrea Simonetti, the usurer's son. And yet she was so far pleased by what the stupid coxcomb had said, that she could not refrain from paying him for it by one of the expressive glances of those magnificent eyes, which were so habitually and constitutionally given to lay a much greater emphasis on the messages entrusted to them than the mistress of them intended.

And Signor Andrea was convinced, accordingly, that his wooing was prospering apace.

The two ladies went out to the *passeggiata*, escorted by Signor Andrea and the young clerk, despite the disappointment of not having Regina

to accompany them. The widow, of course, had the exclusive attentions of Signor Andrea, while Lao Doni, having eaten his holiday dinner, proceeded to pay for it duly by making himself as agreeable as he could to the *padrona*. Regina, if she had not escaped back to her rustic solitudes in such a *savage* manner, would have had the advantage of Signor Meo's assiduous attention. But as it was, when the ladies started for their *passeggiata*, he lounged off with his father to a café.

“ I don't see, father, that I make any progress with Regina ! ” said he, as soon as they were in the street together ; “ I never saw such a girl ! There is no pleasing her any way ! It is not as if she was caring for anybody else. I never heard tell of any girl like her.”

“ Pooh, pooh ! parcel of nonsense ! ” returned his father ; “ Regina is a beauty, and a bit of a spoiled child ; that is all. Just be patient, and take it easy ! She'll come round. What can she do better, I should like to know ? Besides, her father means it ; and that is the principal

point. And what neighbour Bartoli means, I have observed, mostly comes to pass, specially in his own family ; and I have known him these five-and-twenty years. Let old Giovanni Bartoli take his own time for bringing about what he intends shall come about. I think I see Miss Regina playing at whose head is hardest with him !”

The walking party meantime ascended out of the streets of the city to the top of the ramparts, which entirely surround it. This circle of walls, constructed not after the mediæval fashion of those which enclose almost every other Italian city, but according to the notions of fortification of the Vauban school and period, afford one of the most beautiful—perhaps the most beautiful—city promenades in the world. The top of the rampart, which is formed by a lofty brick wall on the outside, but by a bank of earth easily climbed by carriages in two or three places, and by pedestrians in any part on the side towards the city, is wide enough to admit along its entire circuit of a considerable extent

of turf, with some fine timber trees on it, besides a handsome pathway and a road abundantly large enough for carriages to pass each other. The jutting bastions are laid out as gardens. From the height of this bank a thousand picturesque bits of city view are disclosed to the eye, as the circuit of the entire city is completed. But the rare beauty which makes this walk or drive matchless, is furnished by the view outwards from the city. Lucca is built in a well-irrigated plain of exceeding fertility, more highly cultivated, and more rich in every varied shade of greenery than any other district of the peninsula; and is surrounded by hills in no part receding from the city more than a few miles, and in most parts advancing to within a mile or two from the walls. And these hills, rising to the north and east to the dignity of mountains, and generally during a large portion of the year tipped with snow, are of every infinitely varied form and shape that can most contribute to make beauty—beauty of outline, beauty of incessantly varied light and shade,

beauty beyond all words of colouring, beauty of every kind that can most ravish the eye and excite the imagination. And all round the little hill-girt city the walker advances as round a huge panorama, at every step changing his point of view, and bringing the infinitely varied objects in the landscape into fresh positions relatively to each other.

At one point the eye plunges greedily into the deeply shaded gorge between the wooded hills, which the rail has taken advantage of to make its circuitous way to Pisa, around the base of the mountain, by reason of which, as Dante says, Pisa cannot see Lucca. At another it follows less distinctly the opening between the more distant hills, which the unruly Serchio has found for itself; and at a third revels among shining villas, embosomed in woods of chestnut or beech, on the lower slopes of the capriciously shaped hills towards the Baths of Lucca; or is raised higher—higher—higher yet, till it rests on the dazzling sun-gilded white walls and porticos

of some monastery or oratory perched aloft among their craggy summits.

It is all beauty!—to the right—to the left—where the shade is—where the light falls—where the mountain velvet-clothed in emerald tints pushes its swelling bosom into the plain—where the folds of it fall back in black-green depths of shadiest hollows,—all is beauty!

It is not, perhaps, to be asserted that the party of four from the house of Lawyer Morini feasted their eyes on these beauties, to the exclusion of a critical examination of the toilettes of all the Lucca world, who at that hour, and on that day, were assembled on the ramparts. But it may be said that the Lucchese generally are proud of the beauty of their city, and of the singular loveliness of the promenade afforded by its once militarily powerful walls.'

The bastions, as has been said, have been laid out as gardens, and on one of the largest of them, in the midst of very pretty grounds, a café has been built for the dispensing of ices, lemonade, and sorbets to the beau monde of

Lucca on occasions of festival, such as the present.

Thither the *partie carrée* from Signor Morini's betook themselves ; and having selected a table in the gardens under the shelter of a wide-spreading *Pawlonia imperialis*, called for the list of ices, and after prolonged examination, discussion and consideration, gave their orders, and proceeded to enjoy in perfection those delights of the cool evening hour—fresh air, chat, and the amusement of looking at, and being looked at by a crowd—so dear to every Italian, whether prince or peasant.

Farmer Bartoli was meantime driving his daughter homeward in his light little *bagarino*, drawn by a powerful iron-grey in prime condition, which would with ease have performed the journey in half the time the farmer was allotting to it, at the smallest hint of its being required of him.

“I suppose you did not want to stay for their *passeggiata, figliuola mia ?*” said the farmer, as they passed out of the city by one of the gates

by which the rampart is pierced, and over which the promenade, that has been described, passes.

“No indeed, father! I should have liked the *passeggiata* well enough in other company, but I was only too glad to escape from the necessity of making it under the escort of Signor Meo.”

“And why not with Signor Meo? Other company! other company! *figliuola mia!* You are travelling a path that I don’t understand, and that don’t please me!” grumbled the farmer, not now for the first time. And Regina knew very well all about it. “I should like to know,” he continued, “what other company you would have? What you *would* have, and what you want, passes me!”

“But I am quite content, father! I do not want anything more than I have got, thank the saints, and thank you!”

“Regina, my girl, you are talking nonsense, —the more so, when you lump up me and the saints in the same basket that way. I and the saints have mighty little to do with each other, I am thinking. You talk nonsense! But I don’t

think much of that, for it is the nature of women to do so; but I wish I could understand what you are after. There is not a lad in all the country side but you might have had if you had chosen—and some of them very good matches, too.”

“But you would not have me accept a husband that I could not fancy, father?” remonstrated the beauty.

“I don’t say that, Regina; but where the devil’s the man you *do* fancy? That is the way I look at it. I don’t blame you for holding your head high. You have a fair right to do so. I don’t blame you for choosing to have nothing to say to any of the country lads, that would have given their ears for a kind word from you. You look higher. You want to marry a Signore—a gentleman of the city! *E sta bene!* It is all right. You, as the only child of old Nanni Bartoli, of Ripalta, have a very good right to hold your head high. You don’t want to be a *contadino’s* wife. Very good! You choose to be a city lady. Very good! Let the country bumpkins know that you are too dear for their market.

But now, here is one of the best matches in Lucca! And you are at your old ways again, a-tossing your [head, and a-snubbing, and a-going on, and a-behaving as if flesh and blood was not good enough for you. I don't understand you, for my part!"

"Oh dear! oh dear! Why surely, father, it is not so difficult to understand that a girl might not like Meo Morini, without being over particular," said Regina, with an air that denoted that the subject was a very disagreeable one to her.

"But I say that it *is* difficult to understand! Anyway, *I* can't understand it, *figliuola mia!* I tell you that Meo Morini is one of the best matches in Lucca. And you may trust me that I know what I am talking of. I have known Giacomo Morini as long as I have known anything; and I know pretty closely how many figures there were in the last line at the bottom of his book on the 31st of December. You think because they don't live in a newfangled fashion, but keep a thrifty house like their father

did before them, and because Maria Morini wears a white apron over her silk dress, that they are not so well off in the world as others who cut a dash. Silly child! To live as they live is the way to be well off, and better off than those that spend their money *per fare figura*! Can't you understand, silly one, that the less *figura* the Morinis make now, the more *figura* you will be able to make, when you are Meo Morini's wife?"

"God and Holy Mother forbid!" ejaculated Regina, more to herself than to her father. "But what signifies it, father, *figura* or no *figura*, if I can't endure Meo?" she added aloud.

"Don't talk in that way, Regina, because I am thinking that you'll have to endure him!" returned the farmer doggedly. "And what better can you want?" he added after a pause, as if some feeling admonished him of the expediency of bringing the topic in hand back to the ground of expostulation and argument, instead of leaving it on that of such highhanded menace as he had been betrayed by his irrita-

tion into adopting. "What can you want? Is not Meo a very tolerably well-looking fellow as town-bred men go? Has he not the manners of a *Signore di garbo*? Is he not a scholar, if that is what you care for; educated at the University? Does he not show you plain enough that he has nobody in his thoughts but you, morning, noon, and night? What a girl can want more I can't tell!"

"I say again, father, that I want nothing. I am very content as I am. Don't let us think so much about marrying. There's plenty of other things to think about."

"Once again, *figliuola mia*, I tell you that you are talking nonsense! I inherited from my father all that he had! I married a wife who did not come to me empty-handed! I have worked hard all my life, and have made what I had more—pretty considerably more! Now if you think that I am going to die and leave all to a poor silly single woman, for the priests to get hold of and do as they please with, you are mistaken!"

“Priests, father! I am sure you never knew me to be specially fond of the priests, except indeed our own, old Signore Curato; and you know he is not like the rest of them!”

“All’s one for that,” returned her father. “’Tisn’t at your time of life that the women run after the priests. But at forty, if a woman has not a husband, and has money, the priests are sure to be down upon her in a cluster as the crows on a dead sheep on the hill-side! But let that alone. I don’t mean, whether or no, to die and leave you and all I have in the world with nobody to look after you. You’ve got to find a husband, Regina, my girl, as other girls have; only some find it more than a bit difficult to do so; and you have but to choose! That is all the difference! But choose, you must. And for the life of me I don’t see how you are likely to do better than Meo Morini.”

“I hate Meo Morini!” said Regina.

“And why, pray? What is amiss with him?” asked her father.

“He is stupid, and vain, and tiresome, and

self-satisfied ; and—and—and as for loving, if he were to hear to-morrow that you were a ruined man, I should never be troubled with him again.”

“ No, I suppose not,” said the farmer quietly, and as if he were admitting the most natural thing in the world. “ And if we were to hear that his father was ruined to-morrow, of course he would hear nothing more of us. But it is nonsense talking in that way. Nobody is going to be ruined.”

“ But that is not what I call loving, father. If I loved a man well enough to think of marrying him, I should stick to him if he were ruined ten times over,” said Regina with enthusiasm.

“ God forbid !” ejaculated the farmer, fervently. “ But I’ll tell you what it is, *figliuola mia*, there would be a ruined pair of you to stick together. For I will be—but don’t let us talk about such nonsense. I have been very patient with you, my child ; as a father should be with an only daughter, who has no mother—very patient I

have been, while you have been turning up your nose, and snubbing all the best young men all round. But it must come to an end, you know, *Regina mia!* I do not mean to try and make you marry Meo Morini against your will. But, mind you, I won't hear of your taking up with some beggar, because he would stick to you if you were another beggar, or any such nonsense. In such a case your beggar friend would very soon have to show whether he meant sticking to you or not if you had never a *soldo* in the world. Do you understand me, Regina? I advise you to understand me, and to believe me too. For by all the Saints and the Virgin, and by the Volto Santo itself, I am in earnest! So I recommend you to see whether you can't think a little better of Meo Morini. And now go and see that all is as it should be in the house, while I go round and have a look at the home *podere*."

They drove into the stable yard at Ripalta as the farmer finished speaking. And Regina, after performing the duty of a thrifty mistress,

which her father had commended to her, went to her own room to revolve those not very pleasing thoughts which her father's words had been calculated to awaken in her mind.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FAMILY AT UZZANO.

ON that same 14th of September another family group were discussing some of the matters which had formed the subject of conversation among the guests of Signor Morini, the lawyer at Lucca. Francesco Caroli, and his wife—that second wife, who had been the successor of a cousin of the widow Monaldi—and their son Carlo, were talking over the proposition which the widow had made, and which they had accepted. The widow in her anxiety to show that this son Carlo was old enough to be discreetly entrusted with the position to which she had invited him, had, as we have seen, declared him to be “seven-and-twenty if he were a day.” Carlo’s real age, however, was five-and-

twenty. The little family were sitting enjoying the *fresco* of the Ave-Maria hour, after a very frugal supper in their house at Uzzano, as they discussed in all its bearings the invitation which Carlo had finally decided on accepting.

The widow Monaldi, desirous of representing the man who had been her cousin's husband, and his son who was going to be her managing man, in the most favourable light, spoke of the "property" possessed by Francesco by right of his second wife, at Uzzano. But the possession of the Carolis at Uzzano, would hardly have seemed in the eyes of Signor Morini, or Signor Bartoli, to justify the magniloquence of the phrase. Francesco Caroli *did* possess a "property" at Uzzano. But it was one of those properties that seem almost as if a man would be richer without them. The "property" in the first place was the cause, as the widow Monaldi had said, of his living at Uzzano. And surely anybody who had the use of his arms, legs, and brain, would be better off anywhere else than at Uzzano. The description which

the recollections of Signor Bartoli had supplied of the place was by no means an inaccurate one.

The entire place seems to be irrevocably poverty-stricken. In one thing alone it is wealthy,—a wealth shared by so many other places, which possess nothing whatever besides,—a wealth of beauty and picturesque material for artistic studies. Perched high in air on a crag, which raises itself on high out of the flank of the chestnut forest-covered mountain around it, its mellow brick walls may be seen gleaming out from amid the thick leaves when the rays of the sun are on them. At other times a traveller passing below might easily fail to observe that there was a town with its population high in mid-air above him.

The old-world little town, whose first builders evidently selected its site at a time when inaccessibility and not accessibility was the main recommendation of the locality to be chosen for human dwellings, is situated a few miles from Pescia, the chief city of the lovely Valdinievole, the garden of Tuscany. It lies on that side of

Pescia which looks towards Pistoia and Florence. And the high road to these cities passes at the foot of the mountain on the summit of which Uzzano is placed. Thousands, not only of strangers, but of Italians, pass between the flourishing cities of the plain, unconscious of the existence of the mountain stronghold above them, left behind and forgotten, as it has been, not only by the stream of modern life, but by the high road, which is at once the means and the symbol of it.

Yet time has been, when Uzzano was a place of fame. And to the student of history its name is still familiar, preserved, as it has been, in that of one of the most remarkable of the ancient Ghibelline chiefs and statesmen of mediæval Florence, old Niccolo da Uzzano, the Nestor of the aristocratic party, who vainly strove to oppose a barrier to the rising fortunes of the Medici.

By the rambling hunter of the picturesque who has chanced to light on it,—much as one hears of South American explorers coming sud-

denly on the ruins of forgotten cities,—Uzzano will not readily be forgotten.

But what a path to get to it, as old Signor Bartoli said, and might well say. The chestnut woods come quite down to the foot of the hills thereabouts, and are skirted by the high road. And anybody who knows the place, or is on the lookout for it, may discover a little path,—a going-nowhere-in-particular sort of a looking path—stealing in among the trunks of the chestnut trees, and appearing to the wayfarer along the dusty road very inviting, as far as the little bit that he can see of it goes. Very soon, however, almost as soon as he who has entered it has lost sight of the dusty white road, and is in the midst of the green wood, with the mossy turf and rustling dry and prickly chestnut husks beneath him, and the blue, blue sky above, the little path begins to mount rapidly, and very shortly assumes the appearance of a paved road. The pavement is broken here and there, and looks as if it had been untouched by the hand of man for the last three hundred years, as is

probably the real case. Similar paved tracks, intended only for bridle traffic, are very common among the hills covered with chestnut woods of central Italy, leading to the numerous little towns on the mountain tops, which were the earliest sites of habitations, at a period when the now famous cities of the plains and the roads leading from one to another of them, were not. These ancient bridle ways are for the most part very steep; and the paving of them was necessitated by the danger that otherwise the heavy rains and torrents from the melted snow of the upper Apennines would carry away the soil, and turn the intended pathway into a precipitous water-course.

The narrow paved track that climbs from the bottom of the valley of the stream of the Pescia up to the eyrie, which the founders of Uzzano selected for their walled and fortified town, is one of the steepest of these. For a long, long way it climbs among the thick chestnut woods, which prevent the traveller from seeing anything more than the stretch of sun-burnished

white stones which gleams amid the dark greenery for some hundred yards in front of him. Here and there the course of a torrent is passed,—torrent, often not fordable in winter; in summer a mere dry rock-and-stick-encumbered ravine. And from time to time some opening of the wood or passage of the path over some projecting rock, forming a vantage point, enables the wayfarer to catch a glimpse of forest-covered heights far above him, or more extended views over the valley and its cities which he has left behind him.

As he proceeds the way becomes steeper and steeper, and the zig-zags more rapidly succeed each other. At last, at the turn of one of them, if the stranger chance to raise his head from the difficulties of the path so much as to bring his eyes to bear on the blue vault immediately above him, he will see still far, far up, some strange amorphous-looking crags of red brick, partly overgrown with ivy. These are the fast crumbling remains of the walls and battlements and gateways of Uzzano. Soon other

zig-zags in the path bring him within sight of larger masses of ivy-grown red brick wall ; of gateways looking like the half-obstructed mouths of caverns ; of partly-ruined towers, held together by the strong arms of binding ivy which, like a dead religion, first disintegrates the social body in which it has its root, and then still serves to hold its ruined parts for awhile together.

Still all this is so far and so vertically above his head, that it seems impossible that the path he is treading can be intended to reach it. Soon however, a few sharp turns of stair-like steepness disclose other portions of what is discovered to be—or rather to have once been—a considerable town. The towers of two ruined castles are seen at the two extremities of the once entirely walled space, at a considerable distance apart, and the spire of a not yet ruined church stands clear on a jutting corner of the rock, close to one of them. And all this is embosomed in the thick, all-embracing, all-concealing chestnut wood—the magazine of the food of the inha-

bitants. For there still are inhabitants—some thousand or more—and some still good, stone-built houses, to boot, as Signor Bartoli had said, among the number of ruined or half ruined ones, houses which have been, and, indeed, perhaps still are, patrician abodes, marked as such by escutcheons handsomely carved in stone ; houses which were called “*palazzi*” in their day, and may, perhaps, be still called so at Uzzano, with large stone-arched doorways, and window cases with handsome ornamental stone mouldings.

There are still some good houses, as Signor Bartoli had said ; but that of Francesco Caroli was not, as Signor Bartoli had hoped, among them. The house the Carolis lived in, and which, together with a patch of hill-side bearing so many carefully counted chestnut trees, and a smaller patch of scarcely cultivable corn land, and a tiny, hungry vineyard, formed that “property” of his second wife which had caused Signor Francesco to settle there, was indeed the very picture of poverty. The Carolis were, in

truth, very poor. Ever since Francesco the father had come there, and during the entire life of Carlo, his only son, things had been going from bad to worse with him and his.

There had been a succession of bad seasons for the chestnuts, and in the hill villages of central Italy, which burrow, hundreds of them, among the chestnut woods, as mice in the cheese they feed on, a bad chestnut harvest means *famine* for a large portion of the inhabitants. Thousands of these hill-folk never eat other bread than chestnut-bread from year's end to year's end; and though the Carolis were somewhat removed from this lowest level in the social scale, they were not in a position to make failure of the chestnut crop other than a terrible misfortune to them.

Then the miserable bit of cultivable land, so called by courtesy, had for a long series of years been becoming more and more exhausted. Means for restoring it by manure were very difficult to be come by on that hill top. Each year the return for the labour expended on the

unthankful and jaded soil was less and less. Francesco had had long months of illness. Debt had followed, as well as diminished strength. Some of the small heritage of chestnut trees had been necessarily sold. And altogether things had for a long time been going badly with the family.

They had, however, amid their troubles, the happiness of being an united and loving family. Carlo was, and had ever been, an excellent son, and he was now the main stay and prop of the family.

To tell the truth, it was lamentable to see such a man as Carlo Caroli throwing away the prime years of his existence in leading such a life in such a place. True, he was sustaining the declining years of his parents, and therefore could not justly be said to be throwing his life away. But it was clear to everybody but himself that much was sacrificed to the duty [in question. For Carlo was a man who, if his lot had been thrown where life did not stagnate so utterly as it did in the bosom of the forest, on

that remote mountain top, might have pushed his fortunes on many a path of advancement.

The inhabitants of these chestnut-clothed hills of Tuscany are, for the most part, a very fair race, endowed with physical advantages far superior to those of the men of the plains and valleys ; and Carlo Caroli was an admirable specimen of the race. Fully six feet in height, broad chested, long limbed, supple jointed, and without an ounce of superfluous flesh on the large frame, and the iron-hard muscles which clothed it, he was the very perfection of strength, vigour, and activity. There was a free and easy grace too in the lithe, unconstrained movements of his limbs, which is peculiar to the men of the hill and the forest, as contrasted with the denizens of the valleys and the cities. He stood like one of the figures in Ghirlandaio's frescoes—with that absence of self-consciousness and natural dignity which makes all the creations of that artist, and of some of his great contemporaries, look as if they

were the records of a people who had lived before the fall!

Look at the young mountaineer as he stands at the close of a long and hard autumn day's work at the edge of the little bit of corn land, carved out of the forest, from which the bread of his parents and his own has to be won! He is leaning on the long-handled, shield-shaped spade, with which the toil that is done by the plough in more favoured lands has to be accomplished. The handle is some five feet long, and serves to support his crossed arms, as he lingers awhile before returning to his home in the town, gazing at the gloriously setting sun, which is gilding distant woods on other hills, and projecting long suggestively pointing rays into misty distances, where the towers and cupolas of famous cities have their place on the plain. He stands as he has laboured through the day in his white shirt of home-spun hempen yarn, open around the bronzed but nobly-formed neck. One foot is advanced; and, crossed in front of the other leg, rests on the point of the

toe. The body is a little bent forward, resting on the spade, as he gazes somewhat wistfully into the distance.

Somewhat wistfully!—for Carlo Caroli is not without consciousness that he has that within him that might win a place, and perhaps even a name, among the thriving crowds of those distant cities,—more distant from him by the circumstances of his lot than by the space that separated them from him. He was a man of large natural intelligence, as are very many of his class and race. Nor was he without culture. When his father, Francesco, had had some twelve or fifteen years less upon his shoulders, and when things had been going somewhat better with the family than they had latterly done, Carlo had been sent for education to Pescia.

He had gone there with special recommendation from some friends at Uzzano, who had seen that there was much promise in the handsome lad. But the priest-ruled seminary to which he had thus been commended would, it may be suspected, have done little to develope the

power of original intelligence which then was in him, had not fortune thrown him into the way of one who was very pre-eminently capable of doing what the Pescian priestly schoolmasters could not have accomplished. This was a foreigner,—a French-Swiss,—a man of rare gifts and talents, who had been led by the extreme beauty of the position of the little city of Pescia to choose that retirement for the prosecution of the literary labour which made the business of his life. This gentleman was an especial adept in the art of discerning in what cases the bestowal of mental culture would be likely to give a large return. He had thus distinguished young Carlo Caroli; and had brought him into his house as half servant-of-all-work, and half amanuensis;—kept him there from the age of thirteen to that of sixteen; and had thus given him more of what really deserves to be called education than falls to the lot of many young Italians, either in the seminaries of the Church, or the universities of the State.

The necessities and increasing years of his parents had made it necessary that he should return to his mountain home at the end of the period which has been mentioned. He had thus brought away with him much less of completed knowledge than he might have done had he remained with his kind patron a year or two longer. But his mind had been enlarged. Modes and worlds of thought had been opened to him, though but in glimpses, which civilised, elevated, and poetised his mind and character in a manner which, despite original gifts, could not have been the case but for a chance so exceptional as that which had befallen him.

When it became necessary, however, that he should return to the little mountain home, to the labour of extorting food from the unkindly soil, and to the privation of all means of mental culture, it seemed to him as if his lot had only been made the harder to bear by means of the knowledge which had been imparted to him. He set to work, however, heartily; and from that time,—his sixteenth year,—to the present

time, his five-and-twentieth, had been ever increasingly the sole comfort, stay, and support of his now aged parents.

This had been the state of things when the proposition from the widow Monaldi, that Carlo should come and undertake the management of her late husband's business for her, had taken the Caroli family by surprise. It was a great surprise,—and seemed to the little family to require a great deal of thinking before any answer could be made to it. To Francesco Caroli the name of the late wheelwright, Signor Monaldi, had naturally been well known. In days long since gone by, when he had married the cousin of that Marta, then a little girl of some eight years old, now the widow Monaldi, he had known his wife's cousin. And when some years later she had at sixteen married the well-to-do wheelwright he had been present at the wedding; and had continued on friendly terms with the newly-married couple. About two years later than this he lost his wife, after ten years of marriage; and had, after a short

interval, married the Uzzano heiress, the mother of Carlo, and had gone to live where her property was situated. Under these circumstances, he had continued for awhile to keep up his acquaintance with the Monaldis, visiting them from time to time in the neighbourhood of Lucca, and on two or three occasions taking little Carlo with him. Then things had begun to go less prosperously with him; and gradually the acquaintanceship was suffered to drop. For awhile letters were occasionally written between Uzzano and Sponda Lunga,—the name of the populous village in the environs of Lucca, in which the thriving business of Signor Monaldi was situated. But by degrees, these, too, were discontinued; and for several years Caroli and his second wife, going gradually down in the world, as they had been, had heard nothing whatever of their former friends. It may well be that the Monaldis were not equally ignorant of the fortunes of the Carolis, especially as the wheelwright's business frequently took him to Pescia. Nor is it at all improbable that mention

of Carlo during the years that he passed with his philanthropic friend in that city might have reached Sponda Lunga of a sort, that being well remembered, may have helped to decide the widow to take the step she determined on when it became necessary to find somebody on whom she could entirely depend.

In the letter she had written to the Carolis, however, she made no mention of anything of the sort ; but confined herself to setting forth, very briefly, the loss with which it had pleased Providence to afflict her, the goodness of the trade with which it had pleased Providence to favour her, together with a few words recalling the memory of old times, and a suggestion, that it might perhaps suit all parties, if the little Carlo whom she well remembered, and who must now be a young man of some five or six and twenty, would consent to come and undertake the management of her business. "It is a difficult matter," wrote the widow, "for a poor lone woman in my position to find anybody fit to be trusted as I must trust him that takes

this business in hand. I might think to manage for myself, or perhaps might easier suit myself with a manager, if I was a little further on in life. But at thirty-five, and with the ill-luck of not looking anything like that (you remember what I used to be, Francesco, and I am not a jot changed), it is difficult to know what to do. There are plenty here who would jump at it. But, Lord! I know what they are after. There are friends in Lucca that would ask nothing better than to put one of their own choosing in the situation—one young man specially, that I would no more think of trusting with a *lira* of good money than I would of pitching it into the Serchio. So, turning and turning the matter over in my mind (at such times as thinking of my never-to-be-forgotten loss would let me), it came into my head that I could not find anyone that I could trust and who would be likely to be such a comfort to me as your Carlo; while, maybe, I should be doing him and you a good turn too. So please to think of it, and let me have your answer at

your earliest convenience. So no more at this present writing from your loving friend,

“MARTA MONALDI.

“P.S.—Poor dear Monaldi used many times to be obligated to go to Pescia on business ; and Carlo, if he takes it in hand, will have the same calls. So that he might often have the chance of seeing you and his mother.”

This communication, as I have said, had fallen like a bombshell in the midst of the little family at Uzzano. The first thing that was undeniably apparent was, that it was a very good thing that was offered to their acceptance—a good thing not only for Carlo himself, but so good as to yield the means of considerable amelioration in their position to his aged parents also. As matters were going with them up at Uzzano, there was the old house, to be sure, over their heads, capable of affording them shelter, and capable of affording equally good shelter to a family three times as numerous. But the daily struggle for the attain-

ment of a sufficiency of daily food was an incessant one, and was slowly but surely becoming constantly a severer one. In the proposition now made to the family was involved not only certainty of sufficient food for Carlo, but the means of assisting his parents far more effectually than by the labour of his hands on the wretched patches of mountain soil from which the means of keeping their souls and bodies together had to be extorted. Besides, there was the promise of a somewhat brighter and more hopeful life for the young man, than that which seemed to stretch out before him in dreadful monotony of weariness at Uzzano.

And yet the proposal of Signora Monaldi was by no means jumped at by the little mountain family. It was, on the contrary, the subject of much and anxious consideration and discussion. It was a terrible thing to the hearts of all the trio of persons concerned,—this rending of the family in twain;—terrible to the old folks to think of thus losing

the daily sight and companionship of their son, and hardly less terrible to the young man of five-and-twenty to think of quitting the father and the mother and the roof-tree which had made all his life for all the years that he had lived.

It will seem, probably, to English readers, that such an amount of sentiment under such circumstances is very exaggerated,—that it is the ordinary every-day lot and destiny and hope of sons to go forth into the world, and of parents to see them so go forth, and to rejoice in their going, if they go under fairly promising auspices ;—and that this Uzzano family, if truly represented, must have been very exceptional people. But all this would be error, arising from the supposition that a condition of moral sentiments, the product of one set of social circumstances, must resemble that of feelings which have grown out of a wholly different phase of society. The family tie, supposed to be in certain respects notably weaker among the peoples of Latin race than among ourselves, is unques-

tionably much stronger in other respects. The tie between parent and child is stronger, at least in the outward manifestations of its power. An English father would doubtless deny that any Italian loved his boy better than he did his own son;—that this very love caused him to rejoice in the pushing off of his lad into the great stream of active life. Even a mother, with somewhat less of cheerful courage, perhaps, feels the same. But the Italian knows and feels nothing of the needs and advantages of such pushing off into the stream of life. The separation which it entails is to him an unnatural disruption of natural ties. The present writer has seen a Tuscan family—father and mother and six stalwart grown-up sons—all weeping hot tears, because one of the young men was to leave for the army!

It was a matter of very serious debate, therefore, in the old half-ruined house at Uzzano, whether the friendly proposition of Signora Monaldi should be accepted or not. But the proverb which declares that “Needs must when

the devil drives !” is no less true on one side of the Alps than on the other. And the devil of want, grimly staring in at the casementless windows of the Uzzano household, was driving the inmates very hard.

“ We shall get nothing at all off the land if Carlo goes !” said his mother, in a whining tone of lamentation.

“ And I am sure, mother, that it is little enough we get as it is, with all I can do. Things are worse and worse every year. The land is worn out ! That’s where it is,” said Carlo, shaking his head, sadly.

“ And, God knows, I am good for little or nothing now,” said his father with a sigh. “ If Carlo can get little or nothing out of the land, with all the good will and industry he puts into it, you may think what it will be when I have no one to help me.”

“ *Ahi ! povero mio Cecco !* how we are to live at all if the boy leaves us, I do not see for my part,” said his mother, putting up the corner of her apron to her eyes.

“You know whether I like the thought of leaving you, mother,” said Carlo, tenderly; “but it seems to me that you may be a deal better off with the help I shall be able to send you. As for father thinking of tilling that worn-out bit of corn-land with his own hands, it is not to be thought of. My notion is that we should sell the corn patch”

“*Ahi! Ahi! Ah! Misericordia! Santa Madonna abbia pieta di noi! Ah! poveretti noi meschini!* That I should have lived to see this day! *Ahi! Ahi! Ahi!* Oh, Cecco, Cecco, to think of the property that I inherited from my mother, and that has been in the family from time out of mind, all going to the dogs, and lost for ever! Oh, Carlo, my son, my son! that I should live to see your heritage pass away from you!” And Signora Barbara—that was the name of Francesco Caroli’s second wife—broke forth afresh into a flood of garrulous lamentation.

“But, dearest mother!” said Carlo, gently, “if the land requires in labour more than it returns

in food? If to get anything from it at all, it is necessary to spend one's life on the top of this mountain, where it is impossible to put one's time to any other profit?"

"Uzzano was good enough for the Trendi to live in from father to son, and from generation to generation!" (Barbara Caroli had been Barbara Trendi when she had brought the Uzzano "property" into the former family;) "and, though I don't say it to belittle your dear father, as he knows, the Trendi were a better family than the Caroli ever were. They held land in Uzzano for hundreds of years,—before the flood, I believe!—and they always lived here and cultivated their own land, as sponisible and respected people should do. But now the property is to be sold, and we are to go out beggars and wanderers in our old age! Alas! that ever I should have lived for this!"

"Nay, mother! I would not have you leave the old house on any account. But the bit of corn-land, which really takes more worth of labour than it brings in of produce,—and which,

if I am to go away, we have no means of cultivating at all ;—surely it would be better for you and father to have the comfort of a little bit of money, if any can be got for it. Perhaps neighbour Mecatti, the Gonfaloniere, whose land lies all round it, and who has money, would give us a price for it. I am sure anything would be more than it is worth. And then there would remain the bit of vineyard, and the chestnut wood. The chestnut crop could be sold on the trees, and father could make shift to manage the little bit of vineyard.”

“ I think Carlo is right this time, as he mostly is, *Barbara mia!*” said his father, with a feeble and helpless shake of the head. “ It is impossible to refuse this offer, which is bread for us all. And if he goes, what is to be done with the corn-land, I do not know. We should be richer now if it had been sold years ago ! I only hope Mecatti may be willing to give anything for it. Perhaps, as the boy says, I might manage to look after the wine crop. But it’s little enough I am good for.”

“It was a kind thought of Signora Monaldi, to mention that I should be likely to be often at Pescia,” said Carlo, anxious to dwell on any feature of the affair which might render it less painful to his parents. “Of course I should never be there without coming up to pay you a visit.”

Signora Barbara covered her head with her apron, and gave way to prolonged lamentations, mingled from time to time with fragments of litanies, calling on great numbers of saints by name to help her. And old Francesco, who seemed too much habitually depressed and feeble to be able to say or do aught to comfort her, or argue with her, sat helplessly gazing from a half-glazed window that commanded a magnificent view over the wood-covered mountain side, and the richly wooded tops of many a far distant hill; and ruefully shaking his head, till he fell asleep.

Carlo applied himself with all the eloquence he could muster to set before his mother the advantage of the scheme under discussion, care-

fully avoiding any topics which might seem to tend towards throwing discredit on Uzzano, and its "properties," but putting in the most seductive light all the comforts that he hoped his profitable sojourn in the plain would enable him to procure for her and for his father.

And it was accordingly finally decided, as of course it had to be decided, that the widow's proposal should be accepted with thanks, and that an early day should be fixed for Carlo's arrival at Sponda Lunga.

CHAPTER V.

THE FARM AT RIPALTA.

IT was nearly six weeks after the festival of the *Volto Santo*, and the vintage was at hand.

There are, unhappily, sundry things in this work-a-day world which are better heard about than seen ;—things over which the genius of the poet or the imagination of the romancer has thrown a gilding and a glamour, which they do not deserve, and which serve but to prepare a disagreeable disillusion for those who have accepted the pictures of poet or romancer as veridical description of really extant facts. Among these things is the vintage in the southern countries of Europe. There is in reality nothing pretty, nothing Arcadian, nothing attractive about the real business of

getting in the grape crop. It is a sordid, singularly dirty-looking process, which makes it necessary for the drinker of mighty wine to hold fast by the chemical faith, which affirms the purifying virtues of fermentation.

But the aspect of an Italian wine-producing district, a little *before* the vintage, is lovely in the extreme,—wholly differing in this respect from the wine-growing districts of France. Nothing can be uglier than a French vineyard, and the excess of its ugliness seems to be in proportion to the excellence of its produce. The vines in the celebrated regions which produce the choicest growths of wine are pruned down till they resemble at a distance rather dwarf gooseberry plants. The general appearance of the country under this cultivation is brown, arid, unpicturesque in the extreme.

But in Italy, old conservative, unprogressive Italy, they still cultivate their vines as Virgil taught his contemporaries to cultivate them in the Georgics. The vine is still “married to the elm;”—or if not to the elm, to the white

mulberry ; and the result of this method of culture is a rural landscape of perfect and most poetic beauty. The wine is not so good ;—will never, it is asserted, be so good as long as this style of cultivation is preferred to that adopted in France. But if the palate loses, the eye has all to gain.

The whole country is, at the time mentioned, covered by an intricate network of garlands, hanging in interminable festoons from tree to tree, and loaded with the beautiful clusters of yellow, green, red, and purple fruit. There is a suggestion of infinite abundance, while at the same time the entire arrangement of the crop seems to have been adopted with a view to beauty only, which more than any other scene on earth's surface carries one back in imagination to happy Saturnian times, when earth yielded man her fruit to the sound of tabor and fife and timely-beating feet, instead of to the sweat of his brow.

Add to this decking of the earth, Italian atmosphere, Italian skies, Italian dawns and

Italian sunsets ; and the heart must be dull and care-benumbed indeed that does not revel in the beauty !

And there is no district in Italy in which this beauty is seen in greater perfection than around Lucca *la industriosa*. The soil is naturally rich. Water is more abundant than it is in most parts of the peninsula ; and the land is cultivated like a garden.

The large farm at Ripalta was situated in the very midst of this paradise ;—on the southern or left-hand bank of the Serchio, some three or four miles from the city. The Ripalta lands were renowned for their great fertility, even in that region of rich and fertile soil. But they owed their superiority in this respect to circumstances of position, which had,—or in certain contingencies might have,—their disadvantages as well as their advantages. They were all alluvial lands—those fat fields from which the thick grass was mowed three or even four times in the year, and from whose harvests the grain was saved for sowing in less

favoured soils. They were formed of the fertilising marl from the sides of the Apennine, brought down, and spread out there for the purposes of agriculture by the labours of the Serchio during countless ages. But Nature, having some ulterior projects in view besides the formation of the farm of Ripalta, did not stop the Serchio in his toils, when those fields had been duly prepared, as it would have been more desirable for the tillers and owners of them that she should have done. Serchio kept on working away as ever, eternally bringing down fresh soil from the exhaustless magazines of the Apennine; and, though still the cultivation of those fat lowland farms could not have afforded to dispense with his presence altogether, his zeal in the continuance of his old task became in many respects rather a nuisance. For all that, turbulent, busy Serchio could not have been altogether dispensed with. For his rushing lawless stream, more copious than is usual with the rivers of this part of Italy, was all-important in affording the means of constant irrigation.

Such a perennial stream is in these parched countries the true Pactolus, rolling floods of gold!

Nor was it altogether otherwise than well, that the river should carry its waters to the neighbouring Tuscan sea through an artificial channel, formed by huge dykes, the work of many a generation of industrious tillers of the Lucca plains. For thus the work of irrigation was rendered more easy and practicable. The wealth-bearing stream had but to be tapped, and every little runlet which intersected the neighbouring fields was filled with the precious water. Nevertheless, as I have said, there were disadvantages attending this arrangement of the forces of Nature. The farmer of the fields on, or rather under, the banks of the Serchio, might have selected for the motto on his door-lintel *NE QUID NIMIS* as the most important maxim in life. A sufficiency of Serchio water makes a man;—too much mars him. A judiciously regulated supply is wealth;—an excess is ruin. And of such excesses there is always danger in farms situated as that of Ripalta is.

Should a dyke break! Farmer Bartoli did not like to hear such things spoken of.

And in truth the dykes which protected the low-lying farms on either side of the stream did not look as if there were much danger to be apprehended from their breaking. They are huge solid masses clothed with verdure, topped in many places with trees,—generally acacia-trees, whose widely-spreading roots serve to consolidate the earth of which the banks are formed,—and generally affording space and convenient site for a tolerably wide roadway.

The farm buildings of Ripalta were situated very near to the foot of the dyke on the left-hand bank, at a spot where the river curves its stream, so as to cause the dyke, which closely follows its course, to enclose a rounded nook, well open towards the south, and the east. The high road passes at some distance in front of this curve of the river, forming the chord of the arc so formed, and affording very convenient access to the dwelling and farm of Ripalta.

Low as is the situation of the house ensconced in this nook, and shut in by the river dyke to the north and to the west, the view commanded by the windows of it is a very pretty one. There is an old terrace-walk running along the north side of an enclosure, once a pleasure-garden, from the house to a little chapel built on the slope of the dyke, which commands this view in perfection. This terrace-walk, formerly paved with flagstones and enclosed with balustrades, faces the Monte Pisano, and the ravine immediately below it, through which both the Serchio and the high road pass, the one on its way to the sea, some ten miles to the northward of the mouth of the Arno, and the other to Pisa on the banks of the latter river. To the eastward the towers and spires of Lucca may be seen from this happily-placed terrace, across the three or four intervening miles of rich flat garden-like country.

The special beauty of the views commanded from this spot had doubtless been the motive of

the costly construction of this paved and balustraded terrace, at a day before Ripalta had descended from the style and title of a "villa" to that of a farm-house. In common with many another dwelling in Tuscany, such had been the destiny of Ripalta. Had it been, like the generality of the farm-houses, its neighbours, built originally for the purpose of a farm, there would have been no balustraded terrace, no ancient garden, and no chapel. These aristocratic grandeurs had all belonged to it in its better days, before the old Lucchese noble family, which had owned it, and made it a place of suburban delight, had in the common process of Italian social life during the latter centuries become gradually ruined. Then, when the lands had been sold to a rich absentee Leghorn broker, Ripalta had become the residence of the farmer who cultivated them. And of course under this régime, though Farmer Bartoli might have well afforded to keep the place in ornamental repair, if it had ever entered his head to do so, the old aristocratic

appurtenances and ornamentation fell into decay and obsolescence.

The little chapel was indeed still a chapel, some ancient foundation having bestowed a certain number of lire on a canon of the cathedral of Lucca for performing mass there on a certain day in the year ; so that his mitred reverence saw to the more or less decent conservation of the walls and door of the little building, and sent a half-starved priest to mumble a mass on the appointed day for the guerdon of one Tuscan lira, value eightpence. But the place was kept shut all the other days of the year.

And the terrace-walk, which had led to it from the house, was in a sad state of dilapidation. The balustrades were mostly broken, and many removed. Some might still be seen, built into the walls of the farm buildings at some more recent day, when any alteration or improvement had been needed, and any bit of stone which lay to hand had been seized on for the purpose. The flagstones which had once neatly paved it were in many places broken,

loosened from their bed in more, and had here and there shared the fate of the balustrades, and disappeared altogether.

Nevertheless, the disused old terrace, leading nowhere, save to the ever-locked door of the neglected chapel, had still one use. It was the favourite haunt of Regina. She would fain have persuaded her father to cause something of repair to be done in the way of at least arresting ruin, had she not well known that any such proposal would have been deemed altogether absurd and preposterous. As it was, she had with her own hands adorned the fragments of balustrading, which here and there remained upright in their places, with pots of clove-pinks, carnations, and wall-flowers. She had caused the worst parts of the pavement to be a little mended *alla meglio*; and the old terrace with its charming view was, as I have said, her favourite haunt. When originally built it had been effectually secured from the intrusion of those who passed along the top of the dyke above it, by a stone wall. But

this was now ruinous in many places ; and at the corner of the terrace, close to the chapel, some roughly made steps in the bank opened an illegitimate but abusively permitted communication between the road at the top of the dyke and the terrace, and consequently the dwelling-house of Ripalta.

The house, which had once been a fair-sized villa, had not suffered much more in substantial repair than was the inevitable consequence of the changed uses to which portions of it had been degraded. Yet the extent and quantity of the farm-buildings were such as, one might have thought, would have rendered such a degradation unnecessary. Tuscan farm-houses almost invariably have what seems to an English eye a luxuriously large quantity of building about them. And Ripalta was specially well supplied in this respect. Nevertheless what had once been a large dining-room, occupying nearly the whole of the ground floor of the house, on one side of the huge central hall, now served the purpose of a granary. The

great hall itself, occupying the centre of the house, and the height of not only the ground floor, but of the first floor also—a mode of construction very common in Tuscan villas—was surrounded at the level of the first floor by a gallery, intended as a means of access to the upper rooms. But now the greater part of the front of this gallery, excepting where at the end of the hall opposite to the entrance the space was occupied by an enormous wooden escutcheon, on which was emblazoned the arms of the whilom owner of the estate, was thickly hung with various dried or drying produce of the farm—shucks of beans in their long yellow rattling pods, long ropes of onions, and bunches of sweet herbs. In one corner of this great hall, near the entrance, stood an old sedan-chair, which stood there still because no human being for the last hundred or hundred and fifty years had thought it worth while to take the trouble of moving it. Nor could it indeed be said to be altogether useless where it was. For its no longer black top served as a roosting-place for

numerous fowls, and there was no snugger place on the farm for hatching a brood of chickens than the inside of it.

In the opposite corner of the hall the *carro matto* always stood. The "*carro matto*" is a massive platform on two very strong wheels, which is used for moving the lemon and orange trees in their huge terra-cotta pots from their summer stone stands in the garden, to the shelter of the "stanzone," or orangery prepared for their winter habitation. For the orange and lemon will not endure the winter of Tuscany. In November they must be moved to their winter quarters, and in April they again come forth into the sunshine. At Ripalta the lemon-trees and the orange-trees had remained from the days when the garden was a garden and the house a "villa." Orange-trees and lemon-trees are not ordinarily found on Tuscan farms. Nor would they have been found at Ripalta, had they not been remains of its more palmy state. Nor would Farmer Bartoli have cared to preserve them ; but that they are in the immediate

neighbourhood of such a city as Lucca, sufficiently profitable to make it worth while, having them, to keep them. They were allowed to stand, therefore, and sun themselves on their old stone pedestals in the old garden, and were somewhat grudgingly helped into their winter home, when the first frosts came. Somewhat grudgingly, for performed as the operation is in Tuscany by sheer force of arms, without any aid from machinery save that of the simple *carro matto*, it needs some ten or twelve men to move large plants, whose *terra-cotta* pots when empty weigh some eight hundred weight,—such plants as were the secular denizens of the old garden at Ripalta.

On the other side of the great central hall was a huge kitchen, and behind it a small room once a “dispensa,” or butler’s pantry, now the dining-room of the farmer’s family. On the first floor—the only upper floor, that is to say, with the exception of some garrets in the low roof,—one half of the space, that over the former vast dining-hall, now granary, was un-

inhabited and in a state of great dilapidation. The bedrooms of the family were on the other side of the great hall, over the kitchen and present dining-room.

The old garden was at the back of the house, the side, that is to say, opposite to the entrance, though it had in truth more pretension to be called a front than the entrance side, in that more attempt at ornamentation had been expended upon it. The two sides of the building containing the rooms which have been specified, together with some others, projected on the garden side beyond the great hall, which occupied the entire centre of the building. And the space thus enclosed by these two projecting wings was, by the addition of a roof and columns supporting five round arches, turned into that cardinal feature of an Italian dwelling-house, a *loggia*. This was repeated by a second range of columns and arches on the first floor, forming thus a second *loggia* on the upper story. And the effect of this arrangement was to give that side of the old house an extremely

picturesque appearance, as it had been in the days of its villa-hood. Nobody would have denied the old villa that praise. But as this front of the old house was seen now-a-days—at least at the time of year which has been mentioned—opinions might more possibly have differed.

There is a specialty which, in the Autumn, imparts a very peculiar appearance to the generality of farm-houses in the Lucchese district. As one travels through the teeming vegetable wealth of those rich plains, every farm-homestead—almost every one—gleams out from the network of vine festoons, or white mulberry-trees athwart which it is seen, like a house of burnished gold. If the rays of the sun strike on the surface in question, especially when he is setting and his rays slant towards an horizontal direction, the effect is absolutely gorgeous. But the cause to which this singular effect is due, is a very homely one, which can scarcely be held to be adapted to the enhancement of architectural beauty. The fact

is, that every house, particularly on its southern wall, is hung from the eaves to the ground with long strings of the great golden ears of the *gran turco*—the maize—so closely packed as to entirely cover the whole wall. The object of the farmer is not to give himself the appearance of living in a golden house, but simply to thoroughly dry his corn.

That front of the house at Ripalta which has been described, faced the south, and afforded an admirably large surface for the purpose in question. Every column in the *loggia* on either floor was so clothed with this drapery that no fragment of the stone was to be seen. The arches were all equally hung with it, and the entire wall-spaces were closely covered. The whole shone in the setting sun as if the building were literally of gold!

It was just at the hour of the Ave Maria, when the effect that has been described was produced in all its glory of colouring by the last rays of an October sun; and Regina, having completed her various household duties of the

day, had gone out to her favourite terrace, to enjoy the cool hour of evening while waiting for her father's return from Lucca to supper. "*Pigliare il fresco!*" To take the freshness, as the Italians say;—the freshness of the evening hour, after the heat and the labours of the day, is truly a delight, which one must have felt an Italian sun in his fierceness, and the deliciousness of an Italian gloaming to appreciate aright!

The bells in the Lucca towers were heard pleasantly ringing the Ave Maria, as Regina sauntered slowly along her favourite walk. The moon, which was nearly at the full, was peeping on to the scene of the pure blue sky, as if too much in a hurry to play her part to wait till her rival sun had fairly made his exit. Regina, stopping in her sauntering walk to gaze at her as she was rising, had taken off one of the large-leaved hats of Leghorn straw, which the *contadina* girls wear in that part of Tuscany, and was carrying it hanging by its cherry-coloured ribbon, on her arm. The wealth of

hair that was exposed to view was dressed with some care, and with some skill, as is generally the case with Tuscan girls of Regina's station. The glossy dark braids of it were rolled back from the forehead and then carried round to the back of the head, after having been subjected to a twist which caused them to stand high out from the temples in two shiny horns, on which the slanting rays of the declining light were reflected capriciously. The back hair, extraordinarily abundant in quantity, was rolled in large masses at the back of the head, and fixed so high above the nape of the neck as to avoid heating it, and at the same time with the effect of showing to advantage the magnificent carriage of the small head on the graceful and statuesque throat.

She was dressed in a striped cotton petticoat, and well-fitting white bodice, which *was* white, with open sleeves falling loosely about half way between the elbow and the wrist;—a charmingly pretty figure;—with the additional æsthetic charm of being in perfectly harmonious keeping

with the local colouring and characteristics of the scene, which made the setting of the pretty picture.

It may be gathered from what has been seen of Regina, when the reader first met with her in her nineteenth year at the festival of the *Volto Santo*, and from her conversation with her father upon that occasion, that she then, in her maiden meditation, walked as fancy-free as ever maiden walked. It is not above six weeks from that time, and she is now walking evidently in "maiden meditation" of some sort.

She has paused in her walk, and, resting her elbow on a remaining fragment of the terrace balustrade, is looking up at the full moon rising over the Pisan mountain. After gazing motionless for a minute or two, she resumed her sauntering walk along the flagged terrace, and gently swinging in her hand the large broad hat, that hung from it by its ribbon, she began to sing in a low chant, evidently intended for no ear but her own, the well-known old *stornello*—

“ Il mio amore è andato à soggiornare
A Lucca bella, e diventar Signore ! ”

“ My love is gone to live
In Lucca town so fine,
There to become a gentleman ! ” . . .

—“ A Lucca bella, e diventar Signore ! ”—she repeated in an absent manner, raising her voice into a long plaintive wail.

She had been tempted by the sound of her own clear notes in the silence of the evening to let her voice swell into a greater body of sound ; but the melody had been meant to meet no ear but her own. That repetition of the latter bars of it, however, had reached an ear, which had come within hearing just as she uttered the sounds. In the next moment a tall figure was visible on the top of the embankment which overlooked the terrace.

CHAPTER VI.

A DUET BY MOONLIGHT.

ALTHOUGH the sun had by this time quite gone down, and there was but little light save that of the pale but wondrously clear moonbeams, Regina at once recognised the new comer.

The reader has seen the person in question before ; but possibly would not have recognised him so readily as Regina did, especially as, when he was first presented to her acquaintance, his appearance differed considerably from that which characterised him now, and from that which he had worn when Regina first saw him.

It was Carlo Caroli. There was the tall figure, the large easy movement of the limbs,

the long swinging step, the frank, bright face, large dark honest eyes, and confidence-inspiring mouth, with its brilliant white teeth behind its genial smile. All this was the same, except that there was much more of the smile, and a greater expression of brisk elasticity in the movements. But in all other respects of outward semblance our friend Carlo was a changed man.

The coarse though white shirt of homespun hempen yarn, had been changed for one of town-made materials, the collar of which, instead of displaying the bronze-brown muscular throat of the mountaineer, was buttoned and encircled by a bright blue silk, loosely-knotted handkerchief. The large straw hat had given place to one of soft black felt, high and pointed in the crown, broad in the brim, and bound round by a shining ribbon more than an inch wide. The breeches and blue stockings, which displayed to such advantage the long well-shaped powerful limbs, had been discarded and replaced by a pair of town-fashioned linen

trowsers. The shirtsleeves were no longer exposed to view, but covered by a short black velveteen jacket, which, together with the white trowsers, gave an air of considerable smartness to the figure.

The girls of Lucca,—among whom he was already well known as “*il bel montanaro della Monaldi*,” and who failed not to remark to each other, with many a sly glance and malicious gibe, that he would doubtless soon belong to her by a closer tie than a mere business one,—the girls of Lucca would have doubtless agreed in thinking that he appeared to the greatest advantage as they now saw him, but a painter would probably have preferred to take him for a model as he stood spade in hand on his native mountain.

He suddenly checked the quick step with which he had been coming along the top of the dyke, as he caught the sound of her voice, and stopped in the hope of hearing more. But her ear had also caught the sound of a footfall, and she ceased.

“Oh! Signorina Regina! is that you? I guessed as much, when I heard the voice. May I find my way down the bank? I have a little bit of business with Signor Bartoli,” said Carlo, coming forward, as soon as he found that she was going to sing no more.

“Good evening, Signor Carlo. Yes, you may come down, if you can without breaking your neck. You will find some steps in the corner there close to the chapel. They ought not to be there, and father has often said that he would have them destroyed; for people have no right to come down that way. But you may use them for this once.”

“Thanks, signorina,” said Carlo, who had scrambled down the bank without much help from the steps, and was now standing by her side on the terrace. “Is Signor Bartoli at home?”

“No. I am waiting for him. He will be home to supper. He has gone to Lucca. I thought he would have been at home before this.”

“Then, if you will permit me, I will wait a little till he comes. I have walked over from Sponda Lunga on purpose. He sent us a message to say that the oil-press was out of order here. But the first thing is to have a look at it, and see what it really requires. They are costly things, oil-presses.”

“Yes; father often grumbles at the need for repairs. I suppose it is difficult to make them last.”

“No, I think not, if they are properly used. The wheel is the costly part; if that, as I suppose, is in good order, the job cannot be a very expensive one. I must examine it.”

“Will you go to the press-house now directly? There it is. You can go, if you like, without waiting for father,” said Regina, with no toss of the head, or other of the airs we have seen her give herself on other occasions, but with a dropping of her eyes to the ground, and the slightest possible increase of colour.

“Yes, signorina, I can go to the press-house now directly without waiting for your father, if

I like. But the question is whether I may stay here till your father returns, if I like that better? It would be more satisfactory, you know, that we should talk over what will have to be done together."

If all the young men, or any one of the young men, who had enjoyed for the last two or three years any share of acquaintanceship with the Signorina Regina Bartoli, comprising the lawyer's son and the lawyer's clerk, and the usurer's son, and young Cantini, the well-to-do farmer of Le Canre, a rich farm adjoining that of Farmer Bartoli to the southward, and several more,—if all, or any of these, I say, could have overheard the words in which this audacious new comer from the mountains had dared to address Regina Bartoli, they would have awaited with gratified malice the awful annihilation which would assuredly scathe him like angry lightning from the flashing eye and curling lip of the proud beauty. They all knew what sort of retribution far more ceremoniously-worded attempts to pay court to the haughty girl had brought down

upon them. And great would have been the surprise, and exceeding the exacerbation of the malice, if they could have marked what followed. Instead of turning from the offender with the attitude of a *Diana cacciatrice*, and an expression of brow and lip that was enough to make a mortal man sink into his shoes, the magnificent Regina only hung her head a little lower than before to conceal the increased colour of which she was conscious, and swung her hat from its ribbon with a *mutine* sort of movement, as half turning from him, while yet looking round at him from under her eyelashes, she said,

“Of course you may stay on the terrace till father comes, if you like that better. . . I suppose that it *is* necessary that he should examine the press with you.”

“Oh, *absolutely* necessary, signorina. It is impossible for me to avoid waiting till he comes,” said Carlo, with a glance that would have supplied a commentary on his words had Regina been dull enough to need one.

“I hope he will not be long, for your sake, Signor Carlo. It is time he was home now.”

“How kind of you, *gentilissima signorina*. But I assure you that *I* am not the least in any hurry. I should not care, as far as I am concerned, if Signor Bartoli were detained in Lucca till midnight,” returned Carlo, in the same tone.

And still Regina manifested no signs of displeasure. What was come to the girl that she should be so changed! It would seem that her father’s lecturing as to the inexpediency of driving all the men away from her by her haughty severity must have fructified at last.

“But indeed I should care very much, Signor Carlo, for I want my supper, and must wait for it till father comes.”

“In that case, I suppose I must hope too that he will not be long. But it is very pleasant here. What a beautiful spot this is, and what a pity that it should have been suffered to go to decay so! I could almost fancy the old ivy-grown walls of Uzzano peeping out

among the woods at the top of the mountain yonder, just under the moonlight."

"There are some old ruined walls there, the remains of a *castello*. I have heard father say that it was built by the Pisa people against the Lucchese in the time of the old republics. Is Uzzano on the top of a mountain and in the midst of the *selva*, like that?"

Regina used the term *selva* in the sense in which it is always understood by the mountaineers, and indeed mostly by the inhabitants generally of central Tuscany, to mean a chestnut wood exclusively of any other description of forest.

"Yes," returned Carlo, with a tinge of melancholy in his manner; "yes, poor old Uzzano is buried away out of sight of the rest of the world in the thickest of the *selva*, just like that; and it is much higher on the mountain."

The tone in which Carlo had uttered these words, caused Regina to look up inquiringly into his face.

“ You have no ill news from home, I hope ? ” she said, in a sympathising voice.

“ No, signorina, many thanks ; I believe that all is much as I left it there.”

“ Because I fancied that in speaking of Uzzano you seemed to . . . to . . . to speak sadly.”

“ Did I, signorina ? Your ear is a delicate one so to catch one’s thoughts in one’s accent. It is a poor place—a poor, wild, out-of-the-world place, is Uzzano ; and it sometimes makes me a little sad to think of the old couple I have left up there in the old house all alone.”

“ They live on their own property there, your parents, do they not ? ”

“ Yes, signorina. They are proprietors, and they live on their own property . . . such as it is ; but it is not a very comfortable life,” said Carlo, with a shade of painful embarrassment in his manner, and a slightly increased colour in his brown cheeks. “ The principal motive I had in accepting the offer of Signora Marta to come here was that I might be able to give them some help—some better help than could be got from

the labour of my own arms on our own little bit of ground," said Carlo, not without an effort, but looking into Regina's face as he spoke, with an expression of proud determination to prevent her from imagining that his social position was a more brilliant one than the fact could justify.

Regina looked up into his face for half a moment with a look in which a very sharp observer might have traced a shade of disappointment and annoyance, but in the next instant her face cleared, and she said :

"It was very good of you, Signor Carlo ; for I make no doubt that it was a sacrifice to you to leave the mountains and the woods, and to come down and live in the plain. They say that you mountaineers are never happy away from your own hills."

"I accepted Signora Marta's offer because I thought it was my duty to do so. But now . . . now, signorina, mountaineer as I am, I should be sorry to quit this neighbourhood and go back to Uzzano."

"I am glad of that, Signor Carlo. That is

mostly the case, I fancy, when one does one's duty for duty's sake. I suppose you find your home at the Monaldi's pleasanter than you had anticipated ? ”

“ La Signora Marta is very kind.”

“ And you get on well together . . . so well, I am told, I have heard several of the neighbours speak of it. The widow Monaldi is a very pleasant woman, too . . . a very pretty woman . . . for her time of life.”

“ Is she ? ”

“ Do not you think so ? She is generally thought to be so, I believe, by all the people hereabouts.”

“ Thought to be what ? ” asked Carlo.

“ Thought to be a very handsome woman. Surely you must think her so, Signor Carlo ? ”

“ Truly, I have never thought much about it. Certainly she is a comely woman.”

“ Comely ! *altro che*, comely. What magnificent eyes she has ! You can't deny that she has magnificent eyes.”

“ Assuredly I will not deny it, signorina,

... especially if you assert it," said Carlo, demurely.

"All the world asserts it," returned Regina, with just the smallest touch in the world of pettishness in her manner; "and some say, too," she added, after a little pause, "that the new manager not only very soon became aware of the fact, but noted it quite as carefully as he did any of the other circumstances of his new position."

"Bah! *Le solite stupidissime chiacchere*—the usual stupid gossip. Very vulgar gossip, Signorina Regina, which is quite beneath your attention... and mine," said Carlo, in a tone to which Regina was not accustomed, and which seemed almost to carry in the accent of it a reproof to her for having lent her ear to such idle talk.

"I am not usually in the habit of occupying myself with vulgar gossip," returned Regina, in a tone in which a little of her wonted hauteur might have been detected. "But, I was only jesting, as you surely must be aware,

Signor Carlo," she added, in a more good-humoured manner ; " there would be no great harm in it if you had been struck by the good looks of Signora Monaldi. She certainly is pretty."

" I am quite sure you meant no harm, Signorina Regina, and perhaps it was silly in me to be annoyed at such talk among the neighbours. But somehow or other it *does* annoy me, and I should be sorry if *you* were to suppose that—that . . . in short, if *you* could imagine that there was, or was ever likely to be, anything between Signora Monaldi and me, beyond our business relationship."

" But you must not be vexed with me, Signor Carlo," said Regina, speaking in a still kinder tone. " People will talk, you know ; and, putting all joking aside, the neighbours really do suppose that you and the widow mean to make a match of it. Of course they think so all the more because he who becomes the Widow Marta's husband will find himself at the head of a very good business, as well as of a considerable amount of savings besides. I can,

at all events, assure you that there are plenty, not only hereabout, but *signori benestanti di Lucca*, who would jump at la Signora Monaldi's hand if they could get it."

"They may talk as much as they will, and in time they will find out their mistake. And I hope that the Signora Marta may make a wise choice among the well-to-do *signori* of Lucca for her own sake. But it all matters very little to me, if you will not suppose any such thing, Signorina Regina."

Had poor Meo Morini ventured to address such a speech as that to the Signorina Regina Bartoli—which, to do him justice, it must be admitted he had never done,—she would infallibly have told him that she was at a loss to conceive how her ideas upon any such subject could matter to him more than his notions respecting anything connected with her affairs could signify to her, which assuredly was not the least in the world. But on the present occasion she only drooped her pretty head a little more on her bosom, and turning aside

with just the least possible movement of her shoulders, which seemed to intimate a very mild protest that her companion was talking nonsense, she plucked a bit of wall-flower from a garden-pot on the balustrade, and set herself sedulously to examine the structure of it, as she continued her stroll along the terrace.

“I wish father would come home,” she said, presently; “I cannot think what makes him so late.”

“Are you in a great hurry for his return, signorina?” asked Carlo, in a low, pleading voice.

“It is getting late, and he is usually home before this. Besides, I told you, you know, that I want my supper,” she said, looking round at him with a laugh in her eyes. “And then, too, you have your walk home before you, and father won’t let you go without stopping to eat a bit of supper with us, and you have got to settle your business about the oil-press. Signora Monaldi will think you have run away home again to Uzzano.”

“Never mind what Signora Monaldi thinks. I did feel very much inclined to run home again after I had lived at Sponda Lunga only a few days, but I am not at all disposed to do so now, *signorina*. And I have never felt less inclined to quit the neighbourhood of Lucca than this evening. What a lovely night it is! Would you mind, *signorina*, as Signor Bartoli tarries, and . . . and . . . as we have the time before us,—would you mind going on with the song I was so unlucky as to interrupt when I was passing along the top of the dyke? I should so like to hear you sing it. It is a favourite song of mine, although our hill folk sing it somewhat differently from your version of the melody.”

“So our *contadini* do here,” said Regina, “and I am not sure that I do not like our country version the best. But I was singing it just now as I heard a teacher of singing sing it in Lucca.”

“Will you not let me hear it?”

“I will if you will sing it with me. I heard you sing, you know, that evening when we

were at Signora Monaldi's, so I know that you do sing."

"That was the first evening I ever heard you sing, *signorina*. And I heard enough to teach me that I can have no pretension to sing with such a voice as yours. I sing *proprio come cantano i montanari, tutti quanti*—just as the hill-people sing, every man of them. But you sing like a lady of the cities."

It was true that Regina had a fine voice, that she was celebrated for it in her little rustic world, and that her father had been tempted to give her a few lessons from a teacher at Lucca.

"*Che! City lady davvero! Vi pare?*—I have no wish to be a city lady, I assure you, Signor Carlo. But I have no objection to try '*Il mio amore è andato a Lucca*,' if you will sing it with me."

"Certainly I will not miss the opportunity of having the honour of singing with *la Signorina Regina Bartoli*," said Carlo, with a low bow, half intended for funning and half real obeisance.

“ You will excuse deficiencies of voice and skill.”

And then they sang the charming air, one of the most popular of the Tuscan melodies, and the two voices—for Carlo had a by no means contemptible tenor—made very charming music of the well-known song, each in singing adapting the genders of the pronouns and adjectives to the sex of the utterer of the words, amid much laughing and some little heightening of colour occasionally on the part of the lady, and some little expressive application of meaning on the part of the gentleman.

At first they began rather *sotto voce*, singing, as they were singing, only for each other, and in the utter silence and tranquillity of the moonlit terrace. But by degrees the spirit of the melody took hold of them, and each of them, exciting the other to emulation, they both gave out the whole power of their voice, in such sort that, while giving the *stornello* in excellent style, they were perfectly audible to any ears in the immediate neighbourhood of the house.

And Carlo was just giving the concluding *ritornello* of the melody, "*ed a me pare un' angiol' vera, vera,*" with all the concentrated power of personal application that intense meaning of voice and eyes could give to the words, when suddenly from the garden front of the house, below the terrace, a clapping of hands was heard, and a great burly voice, which cried out :

"*Bravi! bravi!* very well sung! And if it was after supper instead of before, I wouldn't mind listening to some more of it! But who have you got there, *figliuola mia*, to sing with you at this time of night? Come down, and let's get in; for I want my supper!"

"There's my father!" said Regina, with some little appearance of confusion in her manner. "Come, Signor Carlo, and explain your business to him at once. Perhaps he will like to see to it before going to supper."

"Here is Signor Carlo Caroli, father," she continued, as she came down some steps leading from the terrace to the garden below, with

Carlo by her side, "come to see what is wanting to be done to the oil-press."

"Oh! come to look at the oil-press, is he? Yes! it needs looking to, as usual;—needs it every year, it seems to me! There is no end to the repairing of it. But it is rather late to talk about oil-presses to-night. I want my supper!"

"Yes, it is late, Signor Bartoli," said Carlo; "but I walked over this evening, after shutting up at Sponda Lunga, to save breaking a day to-morrow; and, thinking that there would be just half-an-hour's light to see to the matter,—as there would have been, if I had had the luck to find you at home."

"But you had the luck to find me out instead, eh? Well, come in to supper! Regina, my child, I have brought Signor Meo home to supper with us. See that we have a flask of the old Chianti! Come in, Signor Carlo. How is the Signora Marta?"

Regina perceived at once that her father, notwithstanding his hospitable words,—which,

as she well knew, would not have failed if he had found the Devil in person in his house at supper-time,—was not well pleased at having found the young wheelwright there, and engaged as he had been, when the farmer surprised them. It was not that there was anything whatsoever to be objected to by the most censorious in anything that had taken place, or that she had the least idea that her father would for a moment suppose that there was so ; but she understood perfectly well that he should be annoyed that Meo Morini should find her so engaged. As for herself, it was disagreeable enough to her to have her Lucca persecutor brought out there that evening, of all evenings in the year. But for all that, she could not help laughing a little quiet laugh to herself, as she thought of Signor Meo's discomfiture, and of her own determination not to permit the presence of Signor Caroli to influence her to be one whit kinder to the lawyer's son than was her ordinary habit.

“ *Buona sera, gentilissima* Signorina Regina,” said Signor Meo, as she and Carlo descended the terrace steps together ; “ I was ravished at the sound of your voice in that lovely melody ; but I have heard it, I must say, to greater advantage alone ! ” he continued, affecting to speak aside to Regina, as if he was conscious of being on terms of much greater intimacy with her than so new an acquaintance as Signor Caroli.

“ It is a disappointment to me that you should say that, Signor Meo, for I fancied that I had sung particularly well to-night. For my own part, I never liked the sound of my own voice so well before,” said Regina, speaking in a specially loud and ringing tone. “ Signor Meo is a great critic, like most other city gentlemen, Signor Carlo,” she continued, turning to Caroli, “ and he did not like our countrified singing. It is a great comfort that we were tolerably well pleased with it ourselves.”

“ Is Signor Meo a singer himself ? ” said Carlo, bowing politely to young Morini.

“ Oh, no ! not a note ! Do you, Signor Meo ? But that makes him all the more fitted to criticise other people, you know.”

“ If you can't sing, Meo, my boy, I rather fancy that we know something you can do, that is likely to go a deal further in putting the cheese on the maccheroni, eh ? ”

“ Well, sir, I should rather hope so. It would be a poor story, I'm thinking, if I could not,” said Meo, with a chuckle, that sounded infinitely odious in Regina's ears.

“ We'll see if we can't manage to settle our little bit of business, dark though it be, Signor Caroli,” said the farmer. “ I should be sorry that you had your walk for nothing. We'll get a light, and go and have a look at the press, while Regina is getting the supper on the table. Meo, my lad, you stay and help her ; carry the lamp for her while she gets up the right flask from the cellar. We shall be back in no time. Come, Signor Caroli.”

So Carlo, not without a discontented look, which was somewhat comforted by that which

met it, was obliged to follow the farmer to the press-room, leaving his rival to make such hay as he could, while his sun shone.

CHAPTER VII.

A SUPPER AT RIPALTA.

“I HOPE you won’t, for a moment, suppose, *gentilissima* Signorina Regina,” said Meo, in his most insinuating manner, as soon as the farmer and Caroli had gone out into the moon-lit night, carrying with them one of those tall brass Etruscan-shaped lamps still peculiar to the inhabitants of the old Etruscan soil,—“I hope you won’t suppose, from what I said to your father, that I do not appreciate the charms of music, specially when it is made by your voice—the sweetest in all the world.”

Regina turned away to the already spread table to make some alteration in the arrangements, without saying a word, and yawning rather ostentatiously as she did so.

“ Ah ! you want your supper, *signorina mia* ; yawning is a sign of an empty stomach. But as I was saying, when I ventured to remark that I have had the privilege and delight of hearing your voice on other occasions to greater advantage than I heard it to-night, I did not mean to imply that you were singing less admirably than ever, but that the rough tones of that *contadino* were not fitted to mingle with yours. Pray understand that.”

“ Oh, yes, signor ; I understand. That is the exquisiteness of your lordship’s city taste. But then I am a *contadina*, you know, and I thought Signor Caroli’s voice charming.”

“ Come now, Signorina Regina, *you* couldn’t think that ! But I know what that is said for. That is merely to vex me !”

“ Vex you, signor ? I do not understand you !” said Regina, turning on him with one of her most magnificently crushing looks of unutterable contempt. “ Why should it vex you that I think Carlo Caroli’s voice a charming one ? I assure you that, for my part,

it is entirely indifferent to me whether you think it good or bad!"

"It is very cruel of you to say so, signorina," returned Meo, whiningly, and with a leer that was intended to express ineffable tenderness, "when you know how I worship every word that falls from your lips."

"I should be very much obliged to you, Signor Meo, if you would reserve that sort of language for the city ladies of your acquaintance, who will, no doubt, appreciate it. I am but a *contadina*, as I said just now, and I do not understand it . . . and do not like it. If you will excuse me, I will go and get the wine my father wished for."

Meo seized the lamp from the table, and prepared to accompany her. "I have my orders, you know, *signorina*,—orders from your father, to carry the lamp for you and escort you to the cellar. Ah! what a lucky fellow I should be, if when we two are alone together in that deep old cellar, the door of the stair should bang, and we should be locked up there together for heaven

knows how long! Perhaps for ever! The longer the better, I should say, so long as we are together—always together, *bellissima Regina!*”

Regina vouchsafed no word of reply to this, but stepped in silence, very majestically and scornfully, towards a door, which, in the neighbourhood of the great kitchen, opened under the main staircase, at the top of a long dark flight of stairs, that led to a deep and large vaulted cellar, extending under the entirety of the great central hall. She suffered Meo to accompany her with the lamp, and to make immense demonstrations of holding it low, and holding it high, now on this side, and now on that, to illuminate and guard against the supposed dangers of the sundry steps, and corners, and doorways which abounded in the old house, as they are apt to do in buildings where they have had time, as it would seem, to develope themselves.

All this Regina permitted without a word; and Meo was in high glee at the interesting office intrusted to him; till, as they passed the

door of the kitchen, his companion called, "Caterina!" and Signor Bartoli's old house-keeper answered with a prompt, "*Si, signorina!*"

Caterina came to the door of the kitchen as she spoke, a brisk, active, dried-up-looking little old woman, with bare feet and very short scarlet petticoats, a clean coarse shirt very open at the bosom, and a bright yellow handkerchief on her head.

"Caterina, *anima mia*, father wants a flask of the old Chianti; you know where to find it. This gentleman has kindly promised to carry the light for you. I wouldn't mind going myself without any light at all; but as the gentleman promised father to carry the light, you had better go with him."

"*Si, signorina*. The old, old Chianti, in the furthest cellar, eh? I know. *Lascia fare a me!* Come along, *signor*, since you are so polite!"

And so Meo, tacitly cursing his fate, and the old woman, and his mistress's scornful humour,

found himself obliged to bestow his light and his guarding care on the steps and the bare ankles of old Caterina.

Before he came back again from his subterranean excursion, the farmer and Signor Caroli had returned from their investigation of the oil-press.

“Signor Carlo thinks that he will be able to make a job of it, without touching the wheel,” said the farmer, coming in. “And now for supper. Where is Signor Meo?”

“Gone for the wine, father, as you told him. Here he comes.”

“Gone for the wine, girl! But I told you to go with him. How should he know where to find what is wanted?”

“Caterina knows very well where all the wine is, and she went with Signor Meo. He was kind enough to light her.”

Here Caterina, with the desired flask in her hand, and Signor Meo, carrying the lamp with a very ludicrously crest-fallen air, came into the supper-room.

“*Mille scuse!* Signor Meo!” cried the farmer. “I never meant to ask you to hold a candle to old Caterina. I told this young lady here to go to the cellar, and that is not altogether the same thing! But I suppose her ladyship has grown too grand to go to the cellar, to fetch her father a flask of wine. Your mother would not ha’ grudged going to her own cellar, if it was ten times a-day! But I don’t know what the girls are coming to now-a-days, not I.”

“I would not have minded going to the cellar alone, father,” said Regina, with quiet decision of manner.

“Oh! that is the way the cat jumps, is it?” grumbled the farmer between his teeth; but he said nothing further at the time.

They sat down to supper at a square table, Regina sitting opposite to her father, and their two guests opposite to each other.

“Now, Meo, my boy, the first glass of the flask for you! I am sure you deserve it! You will find that it is worth fetching, anyway!”

Signor Bartoli took the portly flask in his hand, and first withdrawing from its slender neck a little wad of straw loosely inserted into it, merely to prevent the dust from falling in, or perhaps to prevent the rats from getting at the oil beneath, which forms the real and perfectly efficient closing of the flask, he proceeded to remove this hermetical sealing. When a Tuscan flask has been filled with wine, about a large thimble-full of olive-oil is poured into the neck, which it occupies for a depth of perhaps an inch or thereabouts. This floats upon the top of the wine, and closes the flask, and preserves the wine far more effectually than any cork could do. When the wine is to be used, town-bred folks, and those who have not learned the knack of it, remove the oil by inserting a piece of tow, which absorbs it, and is then withdrawn. But this does not effect the object nearly so thoroughly and cleanly as the true old method, which consists of tossing the oil out by a sudden jerk of the wrist, which holds the flask. One to the manner born will do this

so successfully that every drop of the oil is ejected without the loss of any appreciable quantity of the wine. It may be, however, that some particle of oily matter may remain in the neck of the flask. It is, therefore, a point of good breeding, when any one has thus opened a flask of wine, to pour a little into his own glass, or on the ground, before helping his friend or neighbour.

Of course this mode of proceeding does not contemplate the possibility of a carpet in the apartment in which it has to be performed. Those who drink on carpeted floors have butlers, and decanters, and other such devices of civilization. Farmer Bartoli never dreamed that the bricks of his dining-room could be any the worse for a small anointing with good olive oil! So he tossed out the oily closing of the choice flask with a rapid twist of the wrist, performed in the most gnostic fashion, half-filled his own tumbler, and then hospitably filled that of Signor Meo, amid the protestations *de rigueur* of the

latter, that the farmer had designs on his sobriety.

Then Bartoli passed the portly flask,—holding the contents of very nearly three ordinary wine-bottles—to Signor Caroli; and he having first poured a little wine into Regina's glass, half-filled his own.

“Does the widow's wine need as much water as all that, Signor Carlo?” laughed the farmer. “This don't, I can tell you. Give it a fair trial, man, before drowning it with water! So I hear you and the widow get on famously together, eh? You are going to cut 'em all out! Ho! ho! ho!” And the farmer laughed a great side-shaking laugh.

“Going to?” said Carlo, pretending not to understand what he very well knew to be the drift of the farmer's speech; “say rather that I have cut them all out! since I have got the situation; and, as you say, and as far as I know, Signora Monaldi and I are very well contented with each other.”

“Ah, yes! Butter would not melt in your

mouth, young man! Of course not! We know all about it, don't we, Signor Meo?" said the farmer, with a horse-laugh.

"I suppose Signor Caroli knows his own affairs best himself! But I take it the world hereabouts will be surprised if there is any such person known a year hence as the widow Monaldi, wheelwright," said Meo, with delicate raillery.

"You mean that the widow will marry again; and that in such a case I should most probably lose my position," said Carlo, quietly; "it is, of course, by no means improbable, at the Signora Marta's time of life, and being such as she is. Of course I have thought of all that; and am aware of the precariousness of my situation accordingly."

"Just as if you could not be yourself the husband that is to turn out the manager! And just as if you did not mean to be! Bah, bah, bah! we were not born yesterday, *noi altri Lucchesi!*" said Farmer Bartoli.

"I'll tell you what, Signor Bartoli, you may

be born before the Campanile of Giotto for aught I know ; but I can certify that you are talking of what you know nothing about. At all events, I have to tell you that I have no such meaning as you say I have ; and I shall be obliged to you if you will put it out of your head ; or at least out of your talk," said Carlo, speaking seriously.

"And you really mean to say that you do not intend to go in for the hand of the widow joking apart ?" said Meo Morini.

Carlo looked at him for a minute, as if doubting whether he would condescend to give him any answer at all, and then said, with a cold sternness, intended to warn Signor Meo, that he was not disposed to tolerate any raillery from him on this subject,

"I really mean to say, Signor Morini, that which I have already said ; — as I usually do."

"Then you do not know which side your bread is buttered, young man, and there is a fine chance left open for somebody who does

know better! That is all I can say!" cried the farmer.

"That is for me to judge, Signor Bartoli. But I must remind you that you are talking as if it were in my power to make the Signora Monaldi marry me for the asking of her; while in truth there is not the slightest reason for imagining anything of the kind. I have every reason to be grateful for the kindness which the Signora Marta has shown me since I have been with her. And it would be a very bad return to speak of her, or to hear others speak of her, in the terms you have been using."

"Ah, bah—bah—bah—bah! Widows are widows, and will be widows!" said the farmer.

"Or rather *won't* be, you mean, Signor Giovanni, any longer than they can help it! Haw! haw! haw!" laughed Signor Meo, loudly; while Regina, who had remained perfectly silent during all this conversation, thought to herself that she would a thousand times rather become a bare-footed nun of the severest order that

ever wore sack-cloth, and starved on lettuce, than marry Meo Morini.

Shortly after this Carlo said that it was high time that he should be setting out on his walk home to Sponda Lunga. The distance which separated the large village, so called, from Signor Bartoli's farm, was not much more than a couple of miles, and the road lay chiefly along the top of the northern or right-hand dyke of the Serchio. It was a magnificent moonlight night, and Regina told him that she envied him his walk. Signor Meo, too, said that he must be thinking of going. The farmer had promised him that he would send him in his *bagarino*, as far as the city gates, from which Ripalta was distant four or five miles. So Cecco Lungo, a long-legged, shambling, slipshod lad, who seemed to live in the stables and farm-yard at Ripalta, much on the same terms as the fowls, and the pigs, and the dogs did, and whose only known surname of "Lungo" referred solely to his own physical characteristics, without any reference whatever to any father he might ever have had,

—Cecco Lungo was hurried up out of his lair, in the stable straw, and told to bring the *bagarino* to the door for Signor Morini.

Carlo and Regina were left together in the supper room for a minute or two, while the farmer, followed by Signor Meo, went out to give the above order.

“What an odious oaf it is!” said Regina, with a sigh of relief. “He is my special aversion; and the more I abominate him,—which means the same thing as saying the more I see of him,—the more my father seems to like him!”

“He seems a rather ill-bred blockhead; but I do not suppose that there is anything worse than that to be said of him.”

“That seems to me about enough. What worse could you say of a man?”

“Unhappily there are plenty of men of whom much worse than that may be said without wronging them.”

“I think you seem rather inclined to take Signor Meo’s part, and to think that I am very unreasonable in not liking him. Shall I try to

be a good girl, Signor Carlo, and make up my mind to find Signor Meo as charming as my father considers him."

"I don't think that there would be any use in your trying, signora! You would not succeed."

"And why not, pray? They say that when a girl cares for no one in particular, it is not so difficult to like according to the bidding of fathers or mothers."

"Ah, yes! when a girl cares for nobody, that may be possible; and many other things may be possible to her. It is a bad thing, Signorina Regina, to care for nobody," said Carlo, in a melancholy voice, and with a wistful look into his companion's eyes.

"*Is it such a bad thing, signor mio?*" said she, returning his look not unkindly; "I am not so sure about that," she added, dropping her eyes under cover of her long eyelashes. "I have never tried the other plan, to be sure; that is one thing. '*E se non avvo dami, starò sola,*'" *

* And if I have no lover,
I'll live single.

she warbled in the words of a favourite old *stornello*.

“And no one can find fault with *that* resolution,” said Carlo, laughingly; “but *you* will not have that excuse, at any rate, *signorina*, for remaining single.”

“*Eh! gia, non mancono i dami! ma . . .*” and she completed the sentence by a look and gesture most eloquently expressive of the utter repulsiveness to her of those who had hitherto presented themselves to her notice in that character.

“But it is not fair, *signorina*, to condemn all for the . . . the unworthiness of some. Is it impossible that you should ever be induced to care for any body?”

“*Chi lo sa!* Who knows! I suppose that would depend on who it might be that tried,” said Regina, hanging her head, but with a pouting smile on her lips, and an under glance of rustic coquetry, performed with a perfection of skill, which assuredly was not due to practice; for Regina had cer-

tainly never bestowed such a look on living man before.

“I must say good-night,” continued Carlo, hurriedly; “here comes Signor Bartoli.”

He took her hand as he spoke, as if simply to bid her adieu, and she made no difficulty of frankly placing her little hand in his. But no sooner had she done so, than, as though the touch of it had taken from him all self-control, he covered it with sudden kisses, while he whispered the parting words into her ear,—*Io t'amo! Io t'amo! Regina, io t'amo più che la vita, più che l'anima mia!*”

Signor Bartoli and Signor Meo returned to the room at that instant—the latter to say his good-night to Regina.

“*Felice sera, signore!*” replied Regina, with her usual cold stateliness, bowing slightly as she spoke, and at the same time drawing back, so as to avoid taking the hand he held out to her. There was considerably more colour in the cheeks, however, than was usual with her. Meo did not fail to observe it, and despite

the haughty reserve of manner to which he was so much accustomed, thought to himself, that his assiduities that evening had at last begun to produce some effect on the proud beauty.

Carlo was meantime bidding the farmer good-night, and arranging when he should come over with the workmen to put in hand the repair of the oil press.

“Will it be necessary for you to come over yourself, Signor Carlo?” said the farmer. “Bringing you here—half a day at least—will increase the expense of the job, you know.”

“Oh, no, Signor Bartoli. I should not think of charging you my time. But it is more satisfactory to see after the men. It is always better for our own credit. Perhaps I will look up to see how they are getting on in the evening, after work hours.”

“Well, then, do it that way. You shall have your supper, and we’ll cry, quits!” said the farmer, with a great haw-haw laugh.

“Very well, I shall be content with the bar-

gain. Good-night! Good-night!" And Carlo went out into the moonlight, crossed the garden to the steps leading to the terrace, sprang up the contraband path leading from that to the top of the dyke, and stepped out on his walk homewards.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER THOUGHTS.

MEO'S short drive under the bright moonlight to the gloomy, cavern-looking old gateway of the city, pierced through the thick ramparts, and under the promenade, was a very pleasant one. It was not so much that the soft sweet air of the Italian October night was caressing his cheek, or that the vine festoons through which his road lay were infinitely and fantastically lovely in the capricious moonlight, or that the chaos of mountains to the northward, from among which Serchio finds his devious way into the plain, looking in the pale weird light like the ghosts of a dead world of hills, were pregnant with fanciful suggestion to an imagination capable of being excited by the poetry of

nature. Meo, like his countrymen in general, cared for none of these things. The satisfaction that made his drive a pleasant one came from within. He had supped well ; the good Chianti had done its office of making glad the heart of man, and Meo's meditations were very satisfactorily roseate in their hue.

What a delightful place Ripalta was ! Just the right distance from the city ! It would not cost so much, after all, to put the old house into proper villa-like order. *Morini di Ripalta!* It sounded very well ! How lovely Regina looked as she stood tossing her head at the top of the cellar stairs, when she played him that trick ! It was not to be expected that she would trust herself in the cellar with him, especially after those, perhaps, indiscreet words of passion into which the occasion had betrayed him. He was not sorry that he had uttered them however. It was clear that he had made progress with her that evening. She had never blushed like that before when taking leave of him ! Evidently the right way to woo her was to catch her

quietly here, at home in her own house. Evidently, too, a few words of warmer admiration than he had hitherto been in the habit of venturing to address to her, could do no harm. Oh, yes! She would come right enough in time! Besides, was not her father, old Bartoli, there? Not the sort of man to suffer himself to be baulked in his schemes and wishes, as Regina would find when the push came to the push, in case she should show herself inclined to be skittish. But Meo did not think that she would. The old terrace must be repaired, and the garden put into order. And what magnificent cellarage! He had had no idea that the old farm-house had ever been so much of a place. He certainly should not keep the farm in hand. No! what had he to do with farming? And what need would there be? Old Bartoli had put together a very tidy sum of money, as the lawyer's son well knew. Then, was he not his own father's only child? And had not the old lawyer been adding crown to crown by every sort of means, half a point to

the windward of the law, for more years than he could remember! No, no! no farming for him! He would make *vita beata* (*i.e.*, in Tuscan phrase, live without any sort of occupation whatever in the world). He would keep a smart little *bagarino*—not such an one as that of the old farmer's, which was now carrying him—and a fast-trotting horse, that would run him into Lucca in half an hour. He would have a box at the opera! A close carriage would be needed for bringing Regina into town. But upon the whole, would it not be better to avoid that expense? Might it not be wiser not to have the means at hand for Regina to be running into the city constantly? She was very beautiful! Very attractive! Would make quite a sensation in the fashionable Lucca world! But would it not be wise, after having exhibited her sufficiently to enjoy the triumph and glory of this, not to encourage her to frequent the city? That notion of the opera box was scarcely a prudent one! On second thoughts, it would be best to join some other

men, whom he knew, in an omnibus box, for male occupation only. Yes! That would be safer for Regina! It was a good thing that Regina had all her life been used to a father who had known what authority meant. Nothing like having a wife, and ruling a wife! He ruling Regina! A passing thrill of misgiving came over him at the thought thus presented to his mind. But he reassured himself, that out there at Ripalta there would be facilities greater than in the city. After all, he should be the master! Master, to lock up everything save bread and water, and be off for a week or ten days. Yes! there were ways for the taming of a haughty spirit! And certain recollections connected with sundry phases of his courtship, inspired the triumphant lover with a feeling which made this contemplated process of taming, when performed with a due and comfortably sufficient preponderance of power, well assured and out of the reach of impertinent interference, not a disagreeable subject of meditation.

Leaving the farmer's *bagarino* at the city gate, Meo walked home through the quiet and almost empty streets of the city, and reached the lawyer's house just in time to tell his father and mother, before they went to bed, that his evening had been a most successful one, and that he had reason to think that Regina was beginning to come round.

"Come round!" said his father. "Of course, she will come round fast enough! Did not I tell you so? Girls generally *do* come round to such offers as ours. You stick to her! Gently does it, mind, till you have got her in the shafts; and then you may drive your own pace, you know!"

There had been a little talk between the farmer and his daughter, after their guests had left them; but it had not been so pleasant in its character as Meo's one-sided reveries.

"Now, Regina, my girl," the farmer began, "I want to know what that youngster from Signora Monaldi's came here for this evening?"

"Why, don't you know, father, what he came

here for? And if you had not known all about it before, did not he tell you what he came for? But you expected him, did you not, to look at the oil-press? And it is never too soon, for we shall be gathering the crop early this year."

"To the devil with the oil-press! What has mending an oil-press got to do with singing *stornelli* out there on the terrace, I should like to know!"

"Why shouldn't I sing a *stornello*, or he sing one with me, if I like? There was no wasting of time. I had done all my house-work, and was out on the terrace waiting for you to come home. He came along the top of the dyke, and happened to hear me singing a verse of a song to pass the time. He came down from the dyke and asked me to finish the song. I said I would, if he would sing it with me, for I know that he can sing well. So we sang it together, and you came home and overheard us. And where was the harm of that?"

"Humph! where was the harm of that?—I

did not say there was any harm in that! But do you mean to tell me that when you went out to the terrace you did not know that he would be coming along the dyke presently? That is where it is?"

"Father! *I* know that he was coming along the dyke!" returned Regina, flashing upon him one of those looks wherewith she was wont to annihilate her lovers. "How should I know when he was coming? Besides, had I not every reason to think that you would have been at home before the time that he came here. I went out to the terrace only thinking of when you were coming home to supper, and wondering what kept you so late!"

"Humph!" grunted the farmer again, discontentedly. "I'll tell you what it is, Regina; this young Carlo is all very well in his way;—a steady sort of chap he seems, with a head-piece of his own; and the widow Monaldi is lucky in having suited herself with such a one. If he is not a born fool, he will marry her, and have the business for himself. He may have her for the

asking, I know! And of course he will ask her, and have her. And it will be a very good thing, and suit all parties very well. *But. . . .* it is just as well to remind you of what I said to you coming home from the Morinis that evening of the *Volto Santo* a bit ago. One would have thought, to see you with those two young men at supper to-night, that you was a deal better inclined to take up with that stranger fellow than with the man that is intended to be your husband."

"Nonsense, father, about being better inclined!" said Regina, colouring up, and then colouring more with vexation at the consciousness of it. "It was easier to be decently civil to Signor Caroli than to the other, because he did not persecute me as Signor Morini does. But I told you, father, that other day, when you spoke to me, I told you that I could never think of Meo Morini. I abominate him! He is odious to me! You cannot really think, father, of wishing me to marry a man towards whom I feel as I do, and as

I have always told you I do, towards Meo Morini !”

Farmer Bartoli remained silent for awhile, frowning heavily, and slowly moving his large heavy browed head up and down as he revolved his daughter's words.

“As for what I can't think of,” he said at last, repeating her words, “you know well enough that I have been thinking of nothing else for this year past. Girls must be married. 'Tis the nature of things that they should ! And good girls marry according to the wishes and the sense of their parents. And bad girls do t'other thing. In my judgment, I could do no better for you, *figliùola mia*, than to give you to a man who will 'be as well off as Meo Morini,—a good man, and a sponsible. You can't give any reasonable reason, try as you will, why you shouldn't think well of it. There is not a girl in your position in all the country that would not jump at such a match. *But,*” added the farmer, bitterly, and changing his position as he spoke, so as to confront his

daughter, who was standing with one hand leaning on the still unremoved cloth of the supper-table, and removing his hands from the pockets of his breeches, in order to hold up the finger of his right hand, in comminatory emphasis,—“*but* I know that I cannot make you marry Meo Morini if you are stupid enough and wicked enough to fix your mind on not doing it. One man can lead a horse to water, but twenty cannot make him drink! But mind you this, *figliùola mia*, I am not going to let you marry a beggar;—I don’t say this one or that one;—be it who it may, I shall not give my consent to your giving yourself and my property to some ne’er-do-weel, who would make up to you for the sake of what you have got. I don’t think that it has come to that with you yet, that you would make a marriage *á gran* *

* A common phrase among the uneducated *contadino* classes of Tuscany, by which they mean *clandestino*, i. e., a marriage contracted by suddenly appearing before a priest, and mutual declaration of being man and wife; a marriage ecclesiastically and legally valid, but punished by the civil law. What the meaning attached by the peasantry to the words “*gran destino*” may be, it is difficult to imagine.

destino! I don't think you capable of that! And in no other way will you ever marry a man who is not in a position fairly to pretend to marry my daughter. And don't talk to me the stuff you talked the last time I spoke to you;—that you don't want to marry anybody,—that you will live a single life, and the like stupid nonsense. I am not going to leave the money I have earned to a silly;—well, never mind that,—I shall not leave my property to a single woman. You may trust me that I mean what I say! Perhaps you are thinking that the law will give you what I leave if I don't. But you may make sure of this, if there is nobody that I like to leave what I die worth, I shall not die worth much. Now go to bed, *figliùola mia*, and think over what I have said to you."

And Regina did go; but somehow or other, instead of thinking of what her father had been saying,—though she knew him quite well enough to be sure that he was in earnest in every word he had uttered,—she fell to thin

ing of the extraordinary conduct of which Carlo Caroli had been guilty during those two or three minutes that she had been left alone with him, while the farmer and Meo had gone to look after the *bagarino*, and of those monstrously audacious words which he had whispered in her ear in accents that seemed as if he were pouring his whole soul out with them!

What would Regina Bartoli have done, said, or looked, if any other man on earth had addressed her in such language? What, indeed? And that was a question which any one of her legion of admirers might have asked, if they could have guessed that any man had been bold enough to utter such words. But it was not a question which Regina addressed to herself. It seemed to her, without any conscious thought upon the subject, that there was, and could be, no sort of comparison between the cases. It was a different thing altogether. There was nothing in common between this stranger and all the other men she had known. If this were a man, they were not men. If they were men,

this new-comer must be a god! There did not appear to her to be any question of audacity in the words he had uttered. They seemed to have a different sense and meaning from what they would have had in the mouth of another; to be of the nature of a revelation, which had the power of disclosing as much of her own heart to herself as of his feelings as regarded her. It seemed as if she had been made by those words to perceive and to comprehend that she loved him, quite as much as that he loved her! And the revelation was one which seemed to have the power of the sunbeam—the power of gilding and glorifying all the world around her.

It had the power of so causing her thoughts and fancy to walk in fairy-land, that all that her father had said to her, was pushed back out of ken into an outer world, from which the new happiness that had dawned upon her was safely fenced off.

And yet there was assuredly matter for serious meditation in what the farmer had said; and it was to be feared that that fencing out of

it from her romance world might not prove so effectual as for the nonce it seemed.

But if this was a cloud big with trouble, it was trouble for another day. For the present Regina was happy, with a happiness not only of a degree, but of a kind that was wholly new to her.

And Carlo Caroli, also, as he walked along the top of the dyke, homewards, to Sponda Lunga, carried with him in his heart something new to him, something that had the effect of changing the aspect of all around him, including his estimate of himself and his place in the world. He had not passed in the course of that one evening through all the stages that divide indifference from a state of being utterly, irretrievably, in love. He had already seen Regina on several occasions, and had passed more than one evening in her company. And each time he had seen her, and spoken with her, had done something towards the final and complete enthrallment of his heart.

But it was not till the evening of which I

have been speaking, that he had dared to hope that Regina in any degree reciprocated his sentiments. He had perceived, indeed, that Regina had behaved to him in a manner markedly different from that in which she treated the rest of the young men who buzzed around her. But he had attributed that entirely to the fact that he did not behave towards her as they did ; that he did not persecute her with coarse gallantries, or so conduct himself as to make it necessary that she should keep him at a distance. He could not but admit to himself that his own intelligence and culture were more on a level with hers than those of the generality of her rustic and citizen admirers. And he felt that there had already grown up a bond of friendliness and good understanding between them that did not exist between her and any of the other young men around her. But still there was a long way between this and love. And there was a certain Diana-like touch-me-not sort of regal carriage about Regina, that seemed to hold out but small encouragement to wooing. Had falling in love

been a thing that we can decide upon doing or not doing, as one does upon walking to the left or to the right, Carlo Caroli would certainly have decided that it would be better and wiser not to fall in love with Regina Bartoli. Even supposing that it should come to pass that she should not remain indifferent to him, what good could be likely to be got out of such an attachment? Was it likely that the wealthy farmer, Bartoli, who, as was well known, was bent on seeing his daughter become a city lady, should ever consent to her marrying *him*? He pictured to himself the burly, rich, lowland farmer, accustomed to sweep into his barns and granaries the produce of the fat fields of the plains two or three times in the year, introduced to an acquaintance with the "property" of the Trendi at Uzzano; the meagre, hungry, ungrateful corn patch, now sold, by the bye; the strip of chestnut wood, and the little mountain vineyard! None of the people now around him in his new Lucchese home, knew how poor he and his were up in their mountain home. And he thought of

the scorn with which Giovanni Bartoli would repel the advances of such an one as he, when his position in this respect should be really known.

But now it was too late for any consideration of this sort. Despite all his consciousness that for him to fall in love with Regina Bartoli was a very unwise and imprudent proceeding, he had done it! He had done it, and done it so thoroughly that he knew that it could never be undone again. And though assuredly the thought that it was so, the thought that henceforward the love of that tall, dark-eyed girl, whom a twelvemonth ago he had never seen or heard of, was the one thing necessary to him in this world—the thing without which all that he had hitherto lived for was blank, stale, flat, and savourless; the loadstar of his life, the hope and aim failing which life itself was intolerable;—though the thought of this was not unaccompanied by a sensation of terror, it was yet beyond all words delicious, and inspired a buoyant feeling of triumph, which imparted an extra

elasticity to his step, and an unusual fire to his eye.

For he believed—he thought that he felt almost sure—that Regina loved him! There had been no time for her to make any response to that sudden, uncontrollable outburst of passion, with which he had, without preparation, preface, or management told her that he loved her better than his own soul. She could not, without openly rebuking him before her father and Meo, have replied to it either in one sense or in another. He had poured his lava-flood of passion into her ear, and in the next instant she had been constrained to assume, as far as was within the capacities of her powers of self-control, a bearing, a tone of voice, and a countenance of complete indifference. Nevertheless, he felt that his love was returned. There had been an instant—a half-instant—during which their eyes had met, even while he was speaking those headlong words! Then there was the meeting of their hands at parting—that precious meeting of palm to palm, the electric touch of

which seemed to be yet vibrating all along each nerve that joined the extremity with the heart as he thought of it—that inestimable moment of contact, which seemed to those who stood by so common-place and unmeaning, but in which such volumes of meaning were expressed! Oh, no! He could never doubt any more that Regina loved him!

Carlo was so intently occupied with all these emotions, and with reviewing every word that had been uttered, and every look that had been looked by Regina during the evening, that he almost ran against a man who was coming along the top of the dyke in the opposite direction to him. Hastily stepping aside, he spoke some word of apology, and in the same instant perceived that the other moonlight traveller was Signor Andrea Simonetti, the son of the usurer of Lucca.

The two men had met once or twice before, since Caroli had come to take the management of the widow Monaldi's business, and neither of them had felt at all inclined to like the other.

The reader has already seen enough of Simonetti to be quite sure that he was not the sort of man that Carlo Caroli was likely to find much to his taste ; and it is intelligible enough that Simonetti, with his views on the widow, should not look with much complacency on the man who had been preferred to him as a candidate for the employment he had desired, and who, as all the little Sponda Lunga world imagined, was about equally to cut him out in his pretensions to the widow's hand. Caroli, moreover, was just the sort of man whom such an one as the usurer's son is sure to hate, even had there been no such special motive for his hatred. He possessed just all those qualities calculated to recommend him to the liking of men and the love of women, which Simonetti was devoid of. Carlo was specially frank and simple in his manner and in his nature—qualities which are rarely found in the Italians of the large cities, but which are far from uncommon among those of the country—and there is nothing more odious to a cunning, secret, and treacherous

nature, than the frank simplicity of such a man as Caroli, especially when it is united with that kind of fearless, lofty bearing which seems to say aloud, that all the machinations of the subtlest cunning are as odious to its moral nature as contemptible to its superior strength.

Andrea Simonetti, accordingly, already hated Carlo with the bitter hatred that such natures as his are wont to feel; and Carlo thoroughly disliked Simonetti.

“Is that you, Signor Simonetti? I beg your pardon; I did not mean to push you into the Serchio, as I am afraid I was near doing.”

“I am not so easily pushed out of my path, Signor Caroli! But you are right to be in a hurry. You are waited for at home!”

“There will be no need to wait much longer,” said Carlo, carelessly. “Good night, Signor Simonetti.”

“Good night, signor!” said the other, passing him with a scowl.

Carlo pushed on, and in a few minutes more

was at the door of the widow's house in Sponda Lunga.

It was true, as Simonetti had scoffingly said, that he had been waited for ; true, also, as Caroli might have gathered from the fact that Signor Andrea was able to give him that information, had he given the matter a moment's thought, that the usurer's son had been visiting Signora Monaldi. Carlo had *not*, however, given the matter a moment's thought, his mind having been fully occupied with other meditations. It mattered exceeding little to him how often Signor Simonetti visited the widow. Not but that he would have been very sorry to see the Signora Marta commit so suicidal an act as to give herself and her *scudi*, and her thriving business, into the power and keeping of such a man as Andrea Simonetti. But he was very tolerably well persuaded that the pretty widow was quite able to take care of herself in this matter.

It was between ten and eleven o'clock when Carlo tapped at the door of the widow's house.

His own lodging was on the opposite side of a yard on which the back door of the house opened, and which was occupied by the various appurtenances of the wheelwright business, as was also the building over which his chamber was situated. He might thus have gone to his room directly, without disturbing any of the inmates of the house, in case they should have gone to bed. The inmates, indeed, consisted only of the widow and an old servant woman, who both slept on the upper floor of the little house.

It was a very small one, though the out-houses and buildings, needed for the carrying on of the business, were extensive. On one side of the entrance hall, which seemed a great deal larger than could be either needed for such a dwelling, or in any due proportion to the rest of it, was a room in which the widow habitually lived, and on the other an apartment which used to be the "*scrittoio*," as it was called, of her late husband—his writing-place, office, or counting-house, as we should say. This room,

together with the key of an old escritoire in it, had been formally consigned to Carlo on his first arrival, that it might serve him in the conduct of the business for the same purposes. But he had, in fact, scarcely ever used it for that object. There was a little ante-room to the room he slept in over the workshops, which he had found more convenient for the purpose, and he did all the writing he had to do there. So that the room on the opposite side of the entrance to that in which the widow lived had come to be almost deserted. There was a kitchen and scullery and staircase at the back of these rooms.

Over the great entrance hall was a room lined with walnut-wood presses, all full of immense quantities of house linen, the pride and joy of Signora Monaldi's heart. There must have been at least ten times as much as such a household could have consumed in half a century on the most lavish scale of expenditure. But la Signora Marta was very careful of her store, and was continually adding to it. Open-

ing out of this room was a good room on either side, over the two corresponding rooms below ; and in one of these the widow, and in the other the old servant slept ; the former occupying the chamber over the habitual living-room, and the old woman that over the ci-devant counting-house. Over the kitchen and scullery was a garret, filled with miscellaneous lumber. And this was the whole house. At the back, under the disproportionately large staircase, was a door which opened on to the yard.

It was at this door that Carlo tapped, on his return from Ripalta ; and it was opened to him by the widow herself.

And exceedingly pretty the widow Marta looked, as she stood in the full moonlight in the doorway, attired in that coquettish rendering of her widow's costume, which the length of time since the death of the departed wheelwright now rendered permissible. She had cast aside the cap altogether—at least she had done so in the privacy of her own house. And the smooth black shining bands of her rich hair, bound in

broad simple braids around her small and well-shaped head, formed her sole head-dress, and glistened in the capriciously reflected moonlight. Her dress was a black silk gown, made quite plain, but very accurately fitting the still neat and graceful outlines of the plump, but not as yet too voluminous bust. Over her shoulders was a plain white crape handkerchief, the corners of which were very demurely crossed in front of her bosom, but the texture of which was so delicate that the artistically judicious arrangement of it permitted a discreet portion of the snowy base of the well-formed column of the neck to be revealed in the unveiled plenitude of its charms.

“*Misericordia, Jesu, Maria!*” exclaimed the widow, holding up two white plump hands above her head, though one of them held the small brass lamp in it, and lighted the passage. “What a time is this to come home! And I waiting for you in such a state of anxiety! Waiting, and waiting, and the supper too; and I all alone, for Sunta is gone to bed awhile

since! Oh, Signor Carlo, wherever have you been? I thought for certain that you had fallen into the Serchio. And such a nice supper, too! A *frittata di animelle*, and the loveliest lettuce you ever saw! And I all alone! . . . at least I should have been if Signor Andrea Simonetti had not kindly looked in and supped with me," added the widow, dropping beneath their long silken lashes, the large liquid eyes, which had, till that last clause of her discourse, been directing a fusillade of mildly reproachful glances, more in sorrow than in anger, at the truant.

The widow Monaldi would have imparted to her looks, had she been able to do so, an expression of disquietude and anxious alarm. But this was beyond the capacity of the features nature had assigned to her. She could not look otherwise than placid. Her large dark eyes would beam with liquid glances of mild bovine tenderness, but utterly refused to become the exponents of any hurried, ungentle, or agitating emotion of any kind. She sighed

when she spoke of the sweetbreads and salad ; and the sigh sufficed to communicate a gently-swelling movement to the white crape handkerchief and the snowy bosom beneath it. But it was so deliberately performed and so gently regulated a sigh, that it did not seem rhetorically available to any other purpose than that.

“ I thought you knew, Signora Marta, that I had to go over to Ripalta about their oil-press, which requires mending,” said Carlo.

“ Yes, Signor Carlo, I knew that. But who could have dreamed of you not coming back till this time ? *Santa Madonna!* And you have had no supper ! ”

“ Yes ; that, in fact, was what kept me so long. I had a long time to wait for Signor Bartoli ; he had gone to Lucca. Then, when he did come, he insisted on my staying to sup with them. That was how I came to be so late. I am so sorry that you should have waited for me, Signora Marta.”

“ And all *alone*, Signor Carlo ! ” reiterated the widow, with a glance that would have

liquefied a block of Wenham Lake ice ; . . . “ at least I should have been, but for young Simonetti! And *you* know whether that made up for *your* absence, Signor Carlo! You know I can't abide him. And he ate up every morsel of the sweetbreads. But what could I do? He came in and found the cloth laid for supper. And . . . ahem! . . . I did not like, you know, when supper-time was long past, to go on waiting, and waiting, and waiting, and he a sitting there a looking hard at me all the time, and knowing well who I was a waiting for! I'd have kept the sweetbread and the salad for you, Signor Carlo, only I . . . I felt ashamed like. It might make people talk, you know, Signor Carlo.”

“ I am so sorry you waited!” said Carlo again, for want of anything better to say.

“ Oh, never mind that, if you like better to sup at Ripalta. I dare say you liked it better!”

“ I assure you, Signora Marta, there was nothing so nice as *frittata* of sweetbreads there!” replied Carlo, somewhat jesuitically.

“And it is not every one that can fry them as I do!” returned the widow, with a look of killing tenderness. “Old Caterina, at the Bartolis, is not much of a cook at the plainest thing. And as to la Signorina Regina, I don’t suppose she knows one end of a frying-pan from the other!” said the widow, speaking rapidly. She had been prevented by some feeling from alluding before to Regina by name. But she could not abstain from doing so, tormented as she was by doubts whether it really were the fact that, sweetbreads or no sweetbreads, Carlo preferred supping at Ripalta in company with Regina rather than with her at Sponda Lunga. She took nothing by her motion, however. For Carlo simply answered,

“I hastened home as fast as I could, as soon as they would let me go. And I knew that you had had Signor Simonetti with you; for I met him on the top of the dyke, as I came along, putting my best foot foremost; and, faith, I nearly knocked him into the river.”

“It is a pity you did not quite do it! How

I hated him when he sat there a eating up the sweetbreads I had fried for you, Signor Carlo !”

“ You are too good to me, signora ! But, at all events, I must not keep you up any longer. It is late enough in all conscience !”

“ Yes ! I suppose it is time to say good-night !” returned the widow, with a look which seemed very plainly to intimate that it was a great pity that any such ceremony should be necessary between them.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECRET DRAWER.

IF the oil-press at Ripalto was not repaired in a thoroughly good and satisfactory manner on this occasion, it was not for want of zeal and care in the superintendence of the work. Again and again Carlo had walked over to Ripalta to see that the work was done as it ought to be done. Signor Bartoli was very fond of driving into Lucca in his *bagarino* in the evenings, when the work and the heat of the day were over ; and it was at the sweet evening hour that Carlo was best able to leave his avocations in the yard of the wheelwright widow.

The farmer had very unjustly accused Regina of having loitered on the terrace-walk, below the river-dyke, for the express purpose of meeting

Carlo Caroli ; and Regina, in conscious innocence, had very indignantly repudiated the accusation. Now we have all heard of cases, in which father confessors, deeming it to be their duty to inquire of their penitents whether they had perchance been guilty of some sin, of which they had never before heard or dreamed, have found that, on subsequent occasions, the enlightened sinner was no longer able to reply to the same question with the former satisfactory assurances of innocence. Perhaps it would be trusting too much to the guilelessness of human nature to suppose that, if the farmer had never spoken to his daughter of meeting Carlo on the terrace it would never have entered into her head to do so ; but, at all events, it is certain that, whereas, when first accused, she had been wholly guiltless of anything of the sort, she by no means continued to be so afterwards.

Indeed, as Carlo came along the top of the dyke of an evening, bent on examining the state of progress of the oil-press towards complete restoration, he generally heard a sweet voice

singing lowly, lowly. But the singer had lost all sense of rhyme and rhythm, apparently ; for, very generally, the song gently warbled would run—

“ Il mio *babbo* è andato a soggiornare
A Lucca bella . . . ! ”

a new version, in which the sound was very palpably sacrificed to a sense, which was deemed well worthy of the sacrifice, by both singer and audience.

And thus, during many a delicious, never-more-to-be-forgotten twilight stroll, Regina had begun by pardoning the monstrous audacity of that first sudden declaration of Carlo's love, had next unmistakably encouraged the repetition of the offence, and had ended by being guilty of well-nigh similar conduct herself.

The conversations, however, between Regina and her lover had not been all of them wholly roseate in their hue. Regina could vow that she would listen to words of love from no man under the sun save Carlo ; but she could not undertake to marry him without the consent of

her father. The paternal governments of Italy very jealously backed up with their authority the domestic paternal government in these matters ; and, for a decent girl to marry in the teeth of her father's prohibition, was hardly a thing to be thought of. Without the consent of her father, nothing could be hoped for for the lovers. And what hope was there of obtaining that consent ? These considerations led to the discussion of the social standing and position of Carlo's family between him and Regina.

“ But your people are in a superior position to mine,” argued Regina ; “ they are proprietors, and I suppose, indeed, noble.”

“ Yes, I fancy so ; on my mother's side, at least ; if that will do any good. The Trendi, I take it, were nobles in our country once upon a time ; and I am now the only representative of the old stock ; and there is an immense coat of arms, painted on a bit of wood, large enough to make a dinner-table six times too big for all the remaining members of the family, hanging up on the wall in our old house, if that could at all

help us. But I am afraid, *anima mia*, that your father does not much care for any *scudi* except silver ones with royal arms on them," said Carlo, with a melancholy smile ; "and of those, *Regina mia*, we have very few — very few, indeed."

"But, in fact, you are proprietors," said Regina.

"Proprietors ! Yes ; we are proprietors ! There is the old house, a good one once upon a time ; but now little better than a ruin. And there is the little bit of chestnut wood, and the poor little stony vineyard ; and the corn patch . . . no, that is gone ; that has been sold since I came away, because we were too poor to get on without the little bit of money it brought. That is the extent of our proprietorship ! Why, my place as Signora Monaldi's manager is worth ever so much more than all the Trendi property ! And *I* have had the audacity to fall in love with the daughter of Signor Giovanni Bartoli, of Ripalta !"

“ Why were you guilty, then, of such audacity, *signor mio* ?” said Regina, looking up with laughing eyes into his.

“ Because I could not help myself, *signorina*,” returned Carlo, in the same tone. “ Indeed, indeed, I did not go to do it.”

“ Ah ! that was just my case. I could not help myself. I would if I could. It is a bad job, is it not, Signor Carlo ?” she said, with a mock sigh.

“ Darling ! darling ! darling ! it is the best job that ever came to me yet. If you will love me, *tesoro mio*, come what will, nothing can make me otherwise than proud and happy ; and good will come, somehow or other, if we are true to each other.”

“ That is what I tell myself, Carlo. I have faith in you. If you have very little money now, you will get money. You will win some position which will satisfy my father. But, Carlo, my father always declares that you certainly will marry Marta Monaldi,—that she is quite ready,—and that you must be the biggest fool in the

world if you do not make her your wife. When I hear him talking so, I am half pleased at thinking how much better I know you . . . and then half inclined to be jealous of the widow, for fear you should think as they all seem to think.”

“ Now, that last half of your mind is too bad, Regina *mia!* Come; I think you know me better than that!” said Carlo, remonstrating: “ I marry the widow!”

“ Well! she is very pretty; and very kind; and very rich; and *very* fond of you—as I am told.”

“ Now, Regina, darling, do not talk such nonsense!”

“ But, why is it nonsense? Is not Signora Monaldi all that I have said? And is she not very fond of you?” persisted Regina, with just the least touch of truly feminine jealousy at the bottom of her heart.

“ She is very kind to me, and does all she can to make my position with her agreeable to me.”

“ Now, come, tell the truth, *amico mio*. Have you any doubt that she would be delighted to marry you to-morrow, if you would ask her ? ”

“ Nay, that is not fair. I have no right to speculate on what she might do, when it is quite certain that I shall never ask her to do anything of the kind.”

“ Has she any idea, do you think, that . . . that . . . that you . . . that there is anybody that you care about anywhere else ? ”

“ Sometimes I think she does suspect it a little. I wonder she is not quite sure of it. She knows that I frequently see you ; and she ought to know that it is not likely that I could do that and not love you, *Regina mia*.”

“ Hark ! I hear the wheels of the *bagarino*. You had better go. You were here last night to look after the oil-press, you know.”

“ May I come to-morrow ? ” asked Carlo, hurriedly, and speaking in her ear, while one arm, thrown round her, pressed her pliant figure for an instant to his side.

“ Not to-morrow ; father will be at home.

The next evening. I will be here on the terrace, and will give you notice. But even if father should be at home, you might come again; by that time, to look after the oil-press, you know."

" Good night, my own, my only love ! "

" Good night ! Good night ! There, that is enough."

And so Carlo sprang up the steps in the bank that led to the top of the dyke, while Regina went down to the farm-yard gate to meet her father.

It was one fine evening early in November, that Carlo, returning from one of these visits to Ripalta, found Meo Morini and Andrea Simonetti sitting in the widow's parlour with her. He had returned from Ripalta on this occasion in time for supper, and he was quite sure that la Signora Marta was wishing her two visitors at Jericho, that she might have the coast clear for getting the evening meal ready, and partaking of it *tête-à-tête* with him. For, be as discreet in his admissions to others as he might, and as modest with regard to the widow's estimate of him, it

had become impossible for him not to be aware that the Signora Marta specially affected these sociable suppers in the company of her managing man. Carlo, for his part, would rather have preferred that the two men should persist in staying till the widow was compelled to ask them to supper. For though he did not much like either of them, and had an especial antipathy to Simonetti, he did not like the *tête-à-tête* suppers so well as the widow did. It is intelligible that it may be disagreeable to be exposed in single defencelessness to the attacks of a pretty widow, very decidedly bent on setting her cap at you, when you are very thoroughly in love with another person. Carlo, to tell the truth, rather dreaded these *tête-à-tête* suppers, but he knew well how impatiently the widow was waiting for her visitors to leave her.

“Signor Meo Morini has kindly driven over from Lucca to bring me a sum of money that il Signor Dottore* has received for me, Signor

* In Tuscany an attorney is always so styled.

Carlo, and he has brought Signor Simonetti with him. How much did you say the sum was, Signor Meo ?”

“Five hundred scudi, signora. Father thought that he would send out an even sum. There remain a few scudi in his hands, I believe, which you can take when you balance accounts.”

“I am sure I am much obliged to you, Signor Meo, for taking the trouble of bringing it yourself,” said the widow, graciously.

“Oh, father never sends important sums like that by any other hands than mine or his own. He told me to ask you, Signora Marta, if you had made up your mind about the investment of this money ; and, in case you had not, I thought that I would bring Andrea here with me as the best person to give you a profitable word of advice on the subject.”

“And you may guess, Signora Marta, whether I did not jump at the chance of coming. Not about the dirty scudi. Hang the scudi ! I jumped at the chance of an opportunity of seeing you, Signora Marta !”

“I am sure it was very kind of you, sir,” said the widow, as drily as was possible to her.

“And now, Signor Andrea, that you *are* here,” said Meo Morini, “what advice have you got to give the Signora Marta about this bit of money?”

“Well, there’s always mortgages, five and a-half per cent. on land,” said the usurer’s son; “but what’s five and a-half per cent.? What’s five and a-half to propose to a client, when one’s heart feels towards that client as mine does towards you, *carissima* Signora Marta!”

“Five and a-half is not so bad,” said the widow, throwing up her fine dark eyes, with a gentle sigh.

“And a mortgage on land is a safe investment,” put in Meo.

“Safe!” reiterated the young usurer, contemptuously, “of course anything that I should propose to the Signora Marta would be safe! But ah, *divina donna!* how can one look into those lovely eyes, and think of less than ten per cent.?”

The widow had no liking for Signor Andrea Simonetti—rather the reverse—and she was perfectly well aware that, as far as the investment of her money went, the usurer was there to do a stroke of business *in the way* of business; and that if she entrusted her money to his father, he would give her as little for it as she could be persuaded to take. Nevertheless, when Signor Andrea talked of eyes, and rolled his own at her, from sheer habit, and the innate nature of her, the widow could not help firing into him a full broadside of liquid glances, melting with the most inane and meaningless tenderness, as she replied that ten per cent. was hardly to be expected in these days.

“For others—for the world in general—it may be so, *gentilissima* Signora Marta,” returned the young man; “but not for those whom I would serve as it would be my delight and my happiness to serve you! I would guarantee you ten per cent. for that bit of money in an investment as safe as any mortgage; and here is our friend Meo ready to draw up a bit

of a memorandum of agreement between the parties. Ah! Signora Marta, if you would but consent to that other contract between us, that I proposed to you, it would be an affair of cent. per cent."

"Oh, Signor Andrea, one contract at a time is quite enough for a poor woman like me," said the widow, rolling her eyes from one to the other of the young men, and then, turning them on Carlo, who had sat by in silence all this time, listening to the foregoing dialogue, half in amusement, half in disgust, she continued—

"What would you advise, Signor Carlo? I leave all matters of business to Signor Carlo, now, gentlemen. It is such a comfort to have somebody one can completely trust! and Signor Caroli is good enough to look to these matters for me."

"Oh, indeed!" said Signor Simonetti, with a scowl under his eyebrows at Carlo. "I should not have thought that the gentleman had ever had much experience in the managing of money."

“Faith, I have scarcely ever had any experience in that kind at all,” said Carlo, with a frank smile. “But I think I know where I could make some inquiry,” he added, seriously, “that would be satisfactory. I think, Signora Marta, that I would not be in such a hurry about it. My own notion is that a good mortgage is the most satisfactory investment, even if it brings in rather less.”

“It is all very well to talk about not being in a hurry, signor,” snarled Simonetti; “but I think, begging your pardon, that you are talking of what you do not much understand. Here is the money in hard cash. What is to be done with it? I won’t take the responsibility of its remaining here all night.”

“Oh, I will take the responsibility of that, so far as that goes, signor,” said Carlo, quietly.

“Oh, *you* will take the responsibility, signor!” sneered Simonetti, with a glance of hostility and malice; “and of course, if anything should happen, you would be equally ready to make good the sum?”

“La! Signor Simonetti, what should happen to the money?” said the widow. “Why poor dear Monaldi used to keep bigger sums than that in the house. Many and many’s the time he has had may be a matter of a thousand scudi at a time in the *escritoire* in that room there. Signor Carlo has the key of it. And there is a secret drawer, that the devil himself could not find the secret of, unless he was showed it. The money will be safe enough there.”

“Oh, just as you please, signora! I only spoke from that anxiety for your interest, which you know is dearer to me than it can be to anybody else.”

“Well, I don’t know that, Signor Andrea,” put in the widow, mildly; “you are very kind; but perhaps there’s others equally so.”

“And since this responsible gentleman makes himself answerable for the money, and seems to be anxious that it should be confided to him . . .” said Simonetti.

“Let us have a look at the *escritoire*,” said

Meo Morini ; “ if Signor Monaldi used to keep his money there . . . ”

“ To be sure he did—more than a thousand scudi at once, many a time, as I tell you,” said the widow, getting up and going to the door of the parlour, while the three young men all followed her into the opposite room on the other side of the entrance hall.

“ Where is the key, Signor Carlo ? ” she said, as she put down on the top of the piece of furniture the lamp which she had brought in from the other room.

“ Here it is, signora,” said Carlo, taking it from the breast-pocket of his jacket. “ I always carry it in my pocket, for it is the only lock-up place there is. Not that there is anything in it but a few business papers—estimates, and accounts, and such like.”

The widow took the key, and opened the old-fashioned piece of furniture with her own plump fair hand. It was one of those writing tables with sloping covers, made in such sort, that when opened the flap was turned over on its

hinges, in such a manner, that the side with the key in it, which was uppermost, became undermost, and projected over the floor so as to form a writing table. In this position the key fell out of the key-hole on the floor ; and Signor Simonetti promptly stooped to pick it up. The widow, meantime, not heeding the fall of the key, proceeded to show them the secret of the concealed drawer.

“I do not think you knew of this place, Signor Carlo,” she said, “though you have used the *escritoire* all the time you have been here !”

“No, indeed ! And I do not think anybody would find it out without being shown. It is one of the best managed things of the sort I ever saw !”

“I would defy anybody to hit upon the secret of that, without being told !” said Meo ; “nobody in the world would guess there was anything there. Why, if anybody was told beforehand that there was a secret drawer in the *escritoire*, they would never be able to find

out where it was. I think the money will be safe there, Signor Andrea," he added; "that is, if the Signora Marta makes up her mind to put off deciding on the investment of it."

"Yes! I dare say it will be safe enough; and then . . . since the Signor Caroli always carries the key about him! . . . Only ten per cent. is not to be had every day, Signora Marta; that is all!" said Simonetti, somewhat sulkily.

"Well, I think I will take a little time to consider about it, since that is what Signor Carlo advises me," said the widow.

"Here goes then!" said Meo Morini, who had all this time kept the heavy *rouleaux* of the five hundred scudi in his hand, putting them into the secret recess, as he spoke. "All sealed by father himself, and marked with the amount, and signed with his name;" said Meo, pointing out these particulars as he placed the *rouleaux* in their hiding place. "If you would like to count them . . ." he added.

"*Che! vi pare!*—can you think of such a thing!" said the widow, closing the secret

drawer with her own hand as she spoke ; “ now where is the key ? ” she added.

“ Here it is, signora ! it fell out of the key-hole on the ground ! ” said Simonetti, handing her the key.

“ Thank you, Signor Andrea ! There ! ” said the widow, turning the key ; “ here is the key, Signor Carlo. That is safe enough, I’ll go bail ! ”

The party all returned to the widow’s sitting-room ; and then the two visitors, perceiving apparently either that there was not going to be any supper that night in the widow’s house, or that, if there were, she was not minded to invite them to partake of it, began to say that it was time for them to return to Lucca, and that they must take their leave.

Just as they were doing so, Sunta, the widow’s old servant, came into the room with a “ letter ” in her hand, which, she said, the carrier from Pescia had just brought for Signor Carlo. He had been charged to forward it from

Lucca to Sponda Lunga as quickly after his arrival at the latter town as possible, and he had brought it himself.

The post-office in Tuscany before the revolution had no monopoly of letter-carrying. From almost every town in Tuscany a "*procaccia*," or carrier, used to come to Florence, who did the commissions and transacted all sorts of business for his provincial clients. These useful agents used to have letter-boxes posted in various parts of the city for the reception of letters to be conveyed by them; and the bulk of the population used to give these private posts a very decided preference over the slightly more costly, and equally slow and un-sure Grand-ducal post-office.

Caroli changed colour as he hurriedly took the letter from the old woman's hand, and recognised his mother's handwriting.

Instead of hastening their leave-taking, as English people would probably have done under similar circumstances, the two young men paused evidently to see what might be the

nature of the news thus specially forwarded, with that readiness to make the interests and affairs of other people their own, which is so remarkably characteristic of Italians. The two young men in question, it may be said, were neither of them likely to be models of delicacy and good breeding. But their conduct on this occasion was not due to any special deficiency in this respect. Any others would have done the same, as did the widow herself, and old Assunta, the servant, who remained in the room evidently to hear what might be the contents of the letter.

Carlo became deadly pale as he read the few lines his mother had written, blotched with her tears.

“Good God!” he cried, “my father is ill—is not expected to live! Oh, Signora, I must go! I must hurry to my poor mother! What will become of her!”

“*O, misericordia! Santa Madonna! Poverino! poverino!*” said the widow, wringing her hands.

The old servant, though she had never seen the man who was ill, and had never even heard of him before, and had never seen the younger man, with whose grief she was so suddenly called on to sympathise, a few weeks ago, began to weep genuine tears. She would not care a straw about the event the next morning. But emotion is so catching to these southern natures, that at the moment old Assunta's lamentations were as genuine as if the grief were her own.

The "*procaccia*" had by this time come in as far as the door of the parlour, and stood there with his whip in his hand joining in the chorus of "*O, poverino! che disgrazia!*" unaccused of impertinence in the inmost thoughts of any of those present.

"What shall you do, Signor Carlo?" said Meo; "there is the rail in the morning; but there is no train for Pescia to-night."

"The first train from Pisa does not pass till eight in the morning! You might be at home before that!" said Simonetti.

“Yes! I cannot wait till to-morrow morning! I must go at once! I must leave you to-night, signora!” said Carlo to the widow.

“But how will you go! *Povero mio Carlo!*” said the widow, looking at him with moist eyes; “there is no horse to be had here. You must go to Lucca!”

“I can carry the signore back to Lucca,” said the carrier; “there’s Morino at the door with the *bagarino*. I won’t let him sleep over the ground, though he has done his day’s work.”

“Thanks, friend!” said Carlo; “I will go with you as far as the bridge; and then I will cut across into the high-road. It will be quicker than going to Lucca!”

“But how will you get to Pescia, *figliuolo mio!*” cried the widow; “there won’t be a soul stirring at this time of night.”

“I shall walk it!” replied Carlo; “it is not above a dozen miles; I shall do it quicker so! I shall be at Pescia before midnight,” he added, looking at his watch.

“ *Ahi me! poverino! Ahi, Santa Madonna!*” cried the widow, in dismay at the idea of such a night journey.

“ Dear Signora Marta, the walk is nothing ; I am only anxious to be on my way ! My poor mother has no one to help or to comfort her ! I will write you a line, signora, to tell you how I find things, and when I can hope to be back again. The job at Ripalta is finished. You might let them know at the farm what has happened, and that I have been called away.”

The widow gave a little toss of her head at this recommendation.

“ *They* won't mind when you are gone, so their job is done !” she said.

Carlo understood it all, and said no more on that head. “ Cecco knows what is to be done at Farmer Pertini's,” he continued ; “ I don't know that there is anything else specially to be attended to. Adieu, signora !”

“ *Addio, povero mio Carlo!* the Madonna keep you, and give your father the grace to get well !”

“Now then, friend, if you are ready!” said Carlo to the carrier.

Meo and Simonetti said their good-nights, and got into their *bagarino* at the same time that Carlo mounted that of the carrier. But though Morino did his best, as his master had promised he should do, the lawyer's fast trotting mare carrying Meo and his friend back to Lucca soon left Carlo and the carrier behind.

They reached Lucca quickly, and Meo having dropped his friend at the corner of a street near the usurer's dwelling, proceeded quietly to his own home, and having put up the mare, went to enjoy telling his news to the old lawyer and his mother.

But Andrea Simonetti, as soon as Meo and his *bagarino* were out of sight, instead of proceeding to his home, walked as quickly as he could to a neighbouring mews, and having obtained a light *bagarino*, and a fast horse, with a disregard to a few francs more or less very unusual with him, left Lucca by a different gate from that by which he had just entered it,

and drove through the moonlight at a spanking pace along the white level road towards Pisa,— which is just in the opposite direction to Pescia.

BOOK II.



AT UZZANO.

CHAPTER I.

CARLO'S NIGHT-WALK TO UZZANO.

BETWEEN eleven and twelve o'clock that night—the night that Meo Morini had brought the five hundred scudi to the widow Monaldi, and that Carlo had received the news of his father's dangerous illness—Andrea Simonetti the younger was driving into an inn-yard in the suburbs of Leghorn, much about the same time that Carlo Caroli was pushing on up the steep mountain road through the chestnut forests that led to Uzzano.

It will be necessary in due time that the reader should be made acquainted with the nature of the business that so suddenly took the former to Leghorn. But it will be more conducive to the clear telling of the story that

has to be told, that for the present our attention should be given to the latter.

Carlo had done the distance between Lucca and Pescia, as he said he would, in less than three hours, but he still had the most laborious part of his journey to perform, the climbing of the steep paved path that led to his mountain home. It was an eerie walk through the thick chestnut woods at that still hour of the night. The hoary stones of the old pavement shone out ghastly white in the moonlight, making strong contrast with the gloom and blackness of the closely surrounding wood. The growth of the chestnut tree is, when aged, more fantastic and strange in its forms than that of any other tree of the forest. And the aged trunks, bent and cankered into every imaginable shape of deformity, and the gnarled boughs twisting themselves into all sorts of grotesque semblances, formed thousands of quaint and weird combinations of shapes, which seen in the capricious light and shadows of the cold moonbeams might have sufficed to startle the imagination

with all kinds of gloomy fancies. They might have done so in the case of one nurtured from childhood on the sombre imaginations of the awe-cultivating and wonder-loving north. But to the southern man, whose superstitions, if he be not too material-minded to be altogether void of such, are of a more prosaic and sun-and-daylight-haunting character, the walk through the shape-peopled forest produced no fancies of the kind.

But Carlo's mind was filled with anxious thoughts and forebodings of a more real nature. He had very little doubt that his father's hour had come. The old man had been very visibly failing for some time past, and the manner of his mother's letter had left him very little doubt upon the subject. The question was whether he should be in time to receive his father's blessing before he died.

Pushing his breast against the mountain-side, he laboured on through the forest till he came to a well-known spot in the path, where the paved track made a sharp zig-zag, crossing at

the same time the course of a little mountain torrent by a bridge constructed of three or four masses of rock, which a small degree of movement from the positions in which the operations of Nature had placed them, had sufficed to arrange into the required means of passing the stream.

From this spot the remains of a red-brick tower over one of the ancient gateways of the once-walled town first becomes visible among the trees to one climbing from the plains below, still much above him, but directly in front of him, after the change of direction in the path which has been described. The ravine which the little torrent has formed, and the bottom of which it still occupies, like the last scion of a decayed house inhabiting the mansion, a world too wide for him, which was raised by his forefathers in the days of their wealth and power—the ravine and the torrent take their rise in a fold of the hill formed by the crescent shape of the crest of it; and all along this crescent-shaped crest, which unites two culminating

points where the mountain rises to a somewhat greater height, runs what may once have been the high street of the town. The old gateway, which has been mentioned, is on one of these points ; and the one church, still in good repair and in full exercise of its functions, stands near it ; and a little higher and further back on this same point of the hill, are the ruins of an ancient castle. On the other point, which is separated from that horn of the crescent just described by the whole length of the whilom high street, and on which the traveller turns his back when the zig-zag path crosses the ravine, there is another now nearly disused church, and the less important remains of another castle.

From the little half-natural bridge, if the traveller look up following with his eye the direction of the ravine, a considerable portion of the crescent, with its line of buildings, now more or less broken and interrupted by ruin and decay, is visible. The opening through the woods caused by the ravine renders it so. A little further on in the path, or a little before

the bridge is reached, no such intimation of human habitations near at hand is to be discovered.

As Carlo knew full well, the windows of his own paternal dwelling could be seen from the bridge. And the memory of all the many, many times in past years that he had looked up from this spot when returning from Pescia—specially in the days when he had been living and picking up there what culture he had in the house of his Swiss friend and benefactor—looked up to catch the first glimpse of a light placed in the window as a beacon of welcome : all these memories rushed into his mind, as such memories will rush at moments when some catastrophe breaking the tenor of our lives causes us to look back on the path we have passed, as a sudden disruption of the road he is travelling makes the wayfarer pause to look behind and around him.

Carlo looked up wistfully, knowing well in the darkness exactly where the window should be, and was somewhat surprised to see a light

where the light used in bygone years to be. The window visible was not that of the room where it would be likely that his father was lying. It was the window of a back room on the ground floor of the house, which was used as the family sitting-room, chosen as such for the view it commanded over the forest and the mountain side.

The augury of the light seemed to him an evil one. Why should there be a light at that dead hour of the night? If his father were still lying ill up-stairs it was not likely that his mother would be sitting in that down-stairs room all by herself. If—if his father were dead—if all were over—it might be that the restless widow was wearing out the night watches there, fearing to go to her solitary rest.

He pushed on, increasing his speed, passed beneath the gateway of the decayed town, where now neither gate nor gatekeeper barred the way either by day or by night, passed the foot of the wall which supported the terrace piazza in front of the church, and entered the

ruined main street, straggling along the curved crest of the hill with its broken pavement and half-ruined tenements, divided from each other by gaps where houses now quite ruined had once stood.

It was now past midnight, and not a living creature met the eye or a sound met the ear in all the place. All the inhabitants might be dead for any evidence of life that reached the senses. He had to pass about half the entire length of the street before he reached what had once been known in Uzzano as the "Palazzo Trendi." The large round archway, formed of handsomely moulded stone-work, with its heavy stone escutcheon bearing the armorial devices of the house of Trendi above it, was closed by a simple unpanelled and unpainted door of planks now ashen grey with time and weather.

No condition of morality, however advanced, has yet been known of equal efficacy in the prevention of robbery to the entire absence of anything worth stealing. There are no thieves at Uzzano. If there were, the Uzzano people

would sing as gaily as ever in their presence. And for the same reason there are no locks to the doors.

Carlo, on reaching the door of the Palazzo Trendi, had but to raise the latch and walk in. He did so, and made directly for the sitting-room at the back of the house, in the window of which he had seen a light.

As he neared the door he was surprised to hear voices within ; the voices, as a moment's listening assured him, of a couple of women, of whom his mother was one. He pushed open the door of the chamber, and in the next moment knew that all was over with him, whom he had so greatly wished to see yet once more in life.

He recognised the woman, who was with his mother, as a certain Sibilla Gralli, the housekeeper of the *curato*—the rector, as we should say—or principal priest at Uzzano. Carlo knew that this woman was a gossip of his mother's ; and he had always felt a dislike to her. It seemed however kind and natural

enough that she should be with her friend Signora Caroli at such a time ;—save that it appeared strange to Carlo that she should be there at that hour of the night.

He was not left an instant in doubt as to the state of things in the house. Both the women, on his opening the door, began to pour forth a deafening torrent of vociferous lamentations, invoking “*Jesu Maria,*” the “*Santa Madonna,*” the “*Misericordia di Dio,*” and most of the saints in the calendar in shrill rivalry of each other.

“When did he die ?” asked Carlo, as soon as he could make himself heard amid this outpouring of voluble sorrow.

“Yesterday evening at the Ave Maria—for I heard the blessed bell a-going as I stood by his bed-side, and he like a blessed angel was a-breathing his last breath!” said the widow with a fresh burst of tears.

“But what I say,” whined the other woman, “is, what a blessed grace and privilege to pass at such a moment, and with such sounds in your

ears ! And all the sacraments received beautiful that very morning. I'd as lief as twenty mortuary masses, die like that with the Ave Maria bell a-ringing, as I went ! That's what I say."

"But I only got your letter, mother, this evening at Sponda Lunga ! I came away directly, and have not stopped once till I got here. How came it that the news did not reach me sooner ?"

"The blessed saint went off within an hour after I sent away my letter ! What could I do, Carlo *figliuolo mio* ? I sent neighbour Tagliaferri's boy with the letter down to Pescia yesterday evening. He gave it to the "*procaccia*" with his own hands ; and the "*procaccia*" went away the next morning ! I had no more idea that he was so near his end, when I wrote, than I think you are now, God forgive me for saying such a thing !"

"Well, mother, there is no help for it ; but I would fain have spoken to him once again !" said Carlo.

“ *Ahi! figliuolo mio!* it is very little good speaking would have done! The poor dear saint was not himself for the last two days or more! *Ahi! Dio mio! Madonna mia! abbia pieta di me! Madonna Santa! Santissima!*”

“ *Poverina!*” whined the priest’s house-keeper, “say an *Ave Maria* and a *Pater* or two; it will comfort you! I will say them with you!”

And uplifting her voice to its utmost power, in a sort of cracked shout, which is well known to all acquainted with the popular practices of southern devotion, she led off a vigorous imitation of the chant as given in the churches, “*Ave Maria, gratiá plena,*” &c., while the widow joined in more plaintive and somewhat less gratingly harsh tones.

Carlo waited patiently till the “*Ave*” and the following “*Pater*” had been duly recited; but then finding that they began again at the beginning without the slightest abatement or intermission, he left the room and stepped out again into the silent street.

He strolled up and down before the door, a dozen paces or so to the right of it and a dozen to the left, now stopping to gaze up at the silent stars in the clear sky, and now resuming his sentinel-like walk with a sigh, as his thoughts kept straying from the days past in connection with the father he had lost, to the days before him in connection with the love he had left at Lucca, and all the time watching the door to see when Signora Sibilla, the priest's housekeeper, should leave the house. He was anxious to have an opportunity of speaking to his mother without the importunate presence of this antipathetic old woman; but still she did not come out of the house. Carlo wondered, and began to think that his mother and her friend were going to make a night of it, and would chant litanies till sun-rise. Then the idea occurred to him that perhaps she was intending to sleep there, in order that his mother might not be left to pass the night in the lone house in perfect solitude. The dead body was no longer there.

In accordance with Italian custom, it had been removed to the church very shortly after the death, although the interment was not to take place till the morrow.

As soon as this idea struck him Carlo re-entered the house, and hearing no further sound of chanting again went to the sitting-room at the back of the house. And there to his surprise he still found the Signora Sibilla Gralli in close conference with his mother. The litanies had ceased, having to all appearance been resorted to merely as a pastime while his presence prevented the two old women from conversing. At least it had very much the appearance of this; for again they evidently ceased speaking on the subject which had previously engrossed them as soon as he entered the room.

“I thought you had gone up-stairs to bed, *figliuolo mio*,” said his mother, with a certain degree of embarrassment in her manner. “You must be right well ready for your bed, *poverino*! You will find all ready in your own usual

chamber. Signora Gralli must be going home too! It is very kind of her to come and keep me company awhile—very kind! But now I have got you, I shall not need to be a burthen on her. Good night, my son.”

Carlo went up to bed, leaving the two women together, as it had evidently been his mother's intention that he should do. The room he went to—the same that he used to inhabit before he had left Uzzano to take the situation offered him at Sponda Lunga—was immediately over that in which he left his mother and Sibilla Gralli. He did not go immediately to bed. For though tired, he did not feel as if he could sleep. So he sat himself down by the open window enjoying the cool night air blowing over the chestnut woods, while his reverie continued to blend past memories and future hopes, as one quarter after another was rung out from the church tower, beneath which his father's body was lying awaiting its sepulture. And still as he sate he could hear the two women talking in the room below—no longer singing

Aves and Paters, but continually in close and apparently earnest conversation.

It seemed odd ; and it displeased him, because he had, reasonably or unreasonably, a prejudice against the Signora Sibilla Gralli. She was of course, as the priest's housekeeper, a person of the most unblemished respectability ; and it was rather creditable than otherwise in the eyes of the society of Uzzano, that the female friend who promptly came forward to afford to the widow Caroli the comfort and support of her presence and friendship in the hour of her distress should be the housekeeper of the Signor Curato. And Carlo, after a little wondering, which was set to rest by the reflection that there was no end to the amount of gossip which women would indulge in, when any excuse was to be found for indulging in it, went to bed and to sleep, leaving the women still chattering beneath him.

CHAPTER II.

A FUNERAL AT UZZANO.

CARLO CAROLI had, during the time he had been living at Sponda Lunga, written frequently to his mother—more frequently than Italians in his rank of life are usually in the habit of corresponding with absent friends. Carlo was a ready penman ; and a letter was not so great and difficult an undertaking for him as it is for many Italians in stations even superior to his. It was the first time he had ever been long absent from his parents ; for during his stay as a boy at Pescia he had rarely been many days without seeing them, and frequent communication with the home, which had hitherto been his entire world, had been a comfort and almost a necessity to him.

In these letters he had told the old couple in their mountain home all about his new course of life, and the persons with whom he had been thrown into contact. In the earlier letters Signora Monaldi occupied the most prominent place. Then there came other notices of new acquaintances. There was a graphic account of Meo Morini; the usurer's son, young Andrea Simonetti, was daguerreotyped; then came details of Farmer Bartoli and his lovely daughter—engaged as he had been told, Carlo said in one of his earlier letters, to Signor Meo Morini, the only son of one of the richest lawyers in Lucca. Then there came mentions of this beautiful Regina Bartoli in every letter; gradually she became the most prominent figure in his correspondence. And before he had owned the fact, his mother had shrewdly guessed that Regina Bartoli was, or would very soon become, the most important object on earth to her son.

The letter which had mentioned the report that the beauty of Ripalta was engaged to Bartolommeo Morini, the lawyer's son, was con-

tradicted in the next ; the beautiful farmer's daughter, it was written, was very proud, and held her head very high, and was the despair of all her suitors. Then came detailed accounts of his acquaintance with this haughty beauty ; of their growing intimacy, of their meetings on the terrace, of the injustice of calling Regina proud and haughty ; he had never found her so. Then at last, in reply to close questionings from his mother, came the confession of his great, his unalterable love.

And to the mother all this history, thus gradually unfolding itself, appeared very good and acceptable. She had quite understood from Carlo's earliest letters that the young lady in question was "a great match" in point of those worldly goods, the lack of which was so plentiful at Uzzano. Of course no girl could refuse her heart to her Carlo ; he had but to go forth to see and to conquer. Then was he not a Trendera, with an ancestral palace and family tree of his own ! Farmer Bartoli would of course be only too proud of such an alliance !

But then came letters, in which Carlo spoke of his love, and the object of it, in a very different tone from that which had seemed so natural to his mother; letters written in dejection, in which his own poverty was spoken of despairingly; the greed and ambition of Farmer Bartoli dwelt on as forming an insurmountable barrier to all his hopes of happiness. In short, the poor mother was, when the sudden death of her husband called her son home, very accurately aware of all the circumstances of his position in his new home; and felt more bitterly than ever the evils of the poverty which seemed thus fatally to stand in the way of her son's happiness, as well as of his worldly advancement.

There was one point, however, in the situation of matters at Sponda Lunga, which the Signora Caroli was not acquainted with. It had never come into her head to guess that her son might have the widow Monaldi, and all the Monaldi savings, and the wheelwright business for the asking—and Carlo's letters had never

given her the slightest inkling of any such facts. Had she been aware of this, it is to be feared that Barbara Caroli might not have been so anxious for the removal of any obstacle in the way of her son's marriage with the rich heiress of Ripalta. For though in point of wealth the farmer's daughter was a much more valuable prize than the wheelwright's widow, still it probably would have seemed better to the anxious mother that the impoverished scion of all the Trendi should seize the prize which was immediately and certainly within his grasp, rather than continue a pursuit that by his own account seemed to promise to be a hopeless one.

The Signora Caroli knew nothing of these possibilities, however; and was immensely anxious that her son should succeed where he had placed his affections.

Naturally, it was not long before the conversation between the mother and son, on the morning after his arrival at Uzzano, fell upon the subject of Regina and his love. The mother asked an infinity of questions about Ripalta, the

extent of the farm, the amount of the farmer's supposed wealth, &c., &c. ; and Carlo answered her with an infinity of particulars respecting the colour of Regina's eyes, and other similar points. Still, however, the burthen of his complaint was the hopelessness of ever inducing Farmer Bartoli to consent to a marriage between his daughter and so poor a man as himself.

His mother, however, persistently refused to acquiesce in any such view of the case. Not only would she insist on looking at the matter hopefully, but in reply to the arguments of Carlo, which went to show how wholly disproportioned was his own worldly position to that of Regina Bartoli, she kept on throwing out unintelligible, if not altogether unmeaning hints, that after all there might not be found to be any such very wide difference between the Trendi and the Bartoli. And when Carlo sought for an explanation of such enigmatical utterances, all he could get his mother to say was, that there was no knowing what might turn up; that we never knew the good

the saints had in store for us, and the like.

This was not in accordance with the Signora Barbara's usual tone of mind. Instead of unduly anticipating good, she was generally disposed unreasonably to anticipate evil. She was on ordinary occasions a confirmed pessimist, taking the gloomiest possible view of past, present, and future. Her son, therefore, was the more surprised at the unaccountably *couleur de rose* hue which she persisted in throwing over his prospects of ultimately winning and wearing the beautiful heiress of Ripalta.

The funeral service was fixed to take place on the evening of that day, at eight o'clock. Carlo told his mother that he would remain with her that night, and until noon on the following day. There was a train that passed Pescia on its way to Lucca, at two o'clock, and he determined to return at that hour.

In communicating this intention to his mother, Carlo had armed himself with a variety of arguments—none of them drawn from his impatience

to see Regina again—to prove the necessity of his quitting Uzzano without longer delay. He had anticipated that his mother would have opposed his going, and have striven to induce him to prolong his stay. But in this matter, also, he found her unlike her usual self. She admitted at once the necessity for his quick return, and seemed indeed quite pleased that he should go. Carlo could not make it out.

It had been a lovely night as Carlo had, on the preceding evening, walked up through the woods to Uzzano. And it was so still, when, having gone up to his bedroom, he sat himself down at the open window to enjoy the “fresco” and to think. But as he sat there looking out over the neighbouring forest-covered hills, the sky had gradually become overcast; large, heavy banks of clouds came drifting up from the direction of Leghorn—the south-west. It was evident that there was a strong “libeccio” blowing in the higher strata of the atmosphere; and when Carlo shut his window and at last went to bed, there had not been a star to be seen;

the wind had begun to moan with moody menace among the chestnut trees, and there was every appearance of a coming storm.

The next morning that which these tokens announced had arrived; the wind had fallen, and the rain was descending in torrents. Much had already fallen, and there was every prospect that it would continue steadily. Carlo foresaw that the ceremony in the evening would have to be attended in the wet, and that he should in all probability have a wet walk down the mountain the next day. It was the autumnal break-up of the fine weather, which often comes in Tuscany in a very copious outpouring of rain.

As for the funeral, it was simply the going to the church through the wet—for the absolute interment would take place afterwards, without the attendance of any mourner. It was merely at the religious service in the church that the relatives and friends of the deceased were to attend.

The rain continued unintermittingly during the whole day. Carlo, however, with that dis-

regard of a wetting which is common to most mountaineers, took an umbrella, and went to have a look at the little bit of vineyard, respecting the care of which it was necessary to make some arrangement, if he was to go back again to Lucca.

When he returned to the house he again found Sibilla Gralli in close talk with his mother. She, too, had disregarded the rain sufficiently to come down the street from the house of the *curato*, close to the church, with her thick black cloak and huge yellow oil-cloth umbrella. Carlo felt sure that there was something being discussed between the two women, which was kept a secret from him; and it puzzled him much to imagine what it could be that was so evidently occupying his mother's thoughts; nor could he help connecting it in his mind with his mother's odd and unusually easy acquiescence in his early departure.

The talk between the two women was very evidently brought to an immediate end as soon as he entered the house, and La Sibilla took

her umbrella and walked off through the rain. Then there was more talk between Carlo and his mother about the past and the future ; long egotistical lamentations respecting her own lot, past, present, and future, mixed with eager anticipations of fortune and happiness for her son, on her part ; and never-ending descriptions of Regina's beauty and goodness on his part—and so the long hours of the day wore away till the time for going to the church came.

The building stands, as has been described, on one of the culminating points of the mountain in which the crescent-shaped crest of the hill ends. A jutting rock, so situated as to form a small terrace, large enough for the church and a little piazza in front of it, looking to the south, and raised perpendicularly to the height of some ten or twenty feet above the gate and the houses of the town immediately beneath it, has been turned to account as a vantage ground for the sacred edifice. The view from this piazza is superb, commanding large spaces of the surrounding forest with the neighbouring hill sides,

and glimpses of far-off valley distances. This, however, in fine weather ; not on such a day as that on which old Signor Francesco Caroli was to be laid to his rest. On that day nothing was to be descried from the little piazza athwart the driving rain torrents save mysterious mist-filled abysses, across which surging cloud-banks of moisture might be seen drifting from time to time, as the wind blew in gusts from the higher summits down the ravines which seam the sides of the mountains.

In fine weather this little piazza, with its broad parapet wall just high enough to make a commodious seat, is, as in most others of the many similarly situated hill towns of central Italy, the favourite resort of the townsmen. On festa days, especially, they may be seen congregated there in great numbers, showing their best clothes to each other, and enjoying that never-failing Tuscan delight, a lounge in the open air, and a chat, both sexes after the mass, and the men during the performance of it also.

But on the day in question there was not a soul on the bleak, rain-beaten piazza. It looked as mournful and desolate a spot as the imagination could conceive. But if such was the appearance of the sometimes thronged and sunny terrace to the south of the church, much more oppressively dreary and dismal was the aspect of the little burying-ground to the north of it. This is situated on a turfy slope, rising from behind the church to the somewhat higher level on which the ruins of the old mediæval castle stand; large chestnut trees, the singly placed advanced sentinels of the forest, stand around it and overshadow it. The gloomy donjon keep of the old fortress frowns down upon it. And there "the rude forefathers of the *townlet* sleep," in sparsely scattered graves, rarely marked otherwise than by a little quickly-perishing cross of wood.

In English churchyards a kindly old superstition, surviving in the minds of the people from catholic times, points out that part of the churchyard through which the village path to

church passes, as the most desirable resting-place for the departed. The old faith suggested that, being thus in the way of frequent passers-by, the tenants of the graves would more readily recall themselves to the memory of the living, and thus demand from them the piety of a prayer, or a sprinkling of holy water. And a more imperishable natural sentiment still prompts the man of northern race so to choose the last resting-place of his dead, that the sight of it shall frequently recall them to his thoughts.

But this is a manifestation of northern sentiment. The southern likes not the sight of death, or of the memorials of it. Graves and graveyards are to him unsightly and odious blotches on the smiling face of nature, to be thrust out of the way and out of sight of the living, as far as may be. Duty, indeed, is largely recognised with respect to those who have, as the old Roman phrased it, "gone over to the majority." Masses are to be said, anniversaries are to be instituted and observed, money even is to be paid on their behoof. But

all these observances are avowedly admitted and felt to be disagreeable and painful things to be done, indeed, for the sake of our own souls, and the souls of those whom we have loved, but to be got rid of as soon as possible, to be carefully confined to churches, and church times and occupations, all recognised as gloomy and disagreeable, if necessary evils, and to be rigorously prevented from showing their ill-omened faces at living, laughing nature's banquet-table.

In obedience to sentiment of this sort, the graveyard at Uzzano has been thrust out of the way behind the church, as has been described. In its way the spot is one of no ordinary beauty, and the profound shadiness of it is exceedingly delicious when the hot Italian sun is high in the heavens. The deep rich turf, of a brighter green than could be found in the valleys, is always soft and fresh ; the birds are always twittering in the ivy which drapes the old castle walls ; and the deep stillness of the place is broken only by some far-distant cattle-bell, or by the sough of the wind gently wan-

dering over the vast extent of forest around and beneath. Were Uzzano inhabited by a people of Anglo-Saxon race, this graveyard would not be an unfrequented spot. But the Southrons shun it.

The rain continued to fall without ceasing during the whole day, and was still falling heavily when the time for going to the church came. The Signora Sibilla Gralli came, however, to the Palazzo Trendi to accompany the widow thither. And Carlo walked with the two women through the deserted and half-ruined street. The house of the curate stands at one corner of the piazza, on the front or southern side of the church. And as the little party of mourners were crossing the piazza, having come up the flight of steps which led to it from the lower level of the street, they met the priest stepping across to the church in his surplice, while the sacristan was holding a huge umbrella over his head. This official was also dressed in his official costume—a long white, or would-be white, smock-frock descending to his heels.

“Good evening, Signora Caroli!” said the priest. “I am glad to hear from La Sibilla that you have been enabled to accept the chastisement of the Lord in a good and humble spirit.”

“*Ahi! Signore Curato*, to think that I should have to survive him! He was . . .”

“Yes, yes! *si sa, si sa!* we all know it. But, *Santa Madonna!* what a night to be out in! We shall all catch our deaths! Come, let us proceed to the *funzione* at once. It is not good to remain here longer than can be helped. Signor Carlo, good evening to you! Will you stand there at the head of the corpse, if you please,” said the rector, pointing to the end of the bier nearest to the high altar, as it stood on the damp pavement of the cold desolate-looking church.

“*Queste Signore* will stand one on each side. Give them the candles, Cecco, and let us begin!” he added, addressing himself to the sacristan.

That worthy servant of the church—a lame

and one-eyed young man, of that remarkable hideousness which seems, by some strange dispensation of providence, to be the special attribute of all these lay servitors of the ecclesiastical establishment in Italy—put a huge wax candle, some four feet long, into the hand of each of the three mourners, handed a book to the priest, who took his station at the foot of the bier, and placed himself by the side of his superior, holding in his hand a once elegantly-shaped and delicately chased, but now filthily dirty and battered, brazen pot, with some holy water in it, and a brazen handled brush, almost worn down to the stump, for the sprinkling of it.

These simple arrangements having been completed, the priest commenced the service with a startling suddenness, shouting at the top of his voice in a sort of monotonous recitative, which waked the echoes in every distant nook and corner of the large and empty church, and made the rafters of the unceiled roof ring again. He went at a tremendous pace, and reached

apparently the conclusion of some supplication within half a minute of starting. For the ugly sacristan shot into the course of his chant an "Amen," as short, sharp, and loud as the bark of a terrier, and continued to repeat this at very short intervals. Presently the priest, without stopping for an instant in his vociferation, took the brush from the holy water pot, and walked round the bier, sprinkling the lustral water on it with a short sharp jerk of the wrist, that seemed to challenge admiration for the workmanlike smartness of the action. Then the brush was handed first to Carlo, and then to the two women, one after the other, and each performed the tour of the bier, holding their long candle in one hand, and sprinkling with the other, while the priest made play, without a moment's pause, hurrying on to the end of his work.

It was soon reached. The one-eyed sacristan received the book from the hands of the priest before the concluding words were out of his mouth, took the candles from the hands of the

mourners while shouting out his own last "Amen" with extra vigour, threw them into a long deal box prepared for the purpose, and turning sharp round hobbled down the nave behind his superior, to resume the umbrella which he had left in the church porch.

And thus the funeral of poor Francesco Caroli was performed quite to the satisfaction of his family, to whom the utter absence of any shadow of a pretence of anything like reverence or religious feeling did not appear at all offensive, or, as indeed it was not, anything at all unusual.

The priest, with a brief "Good night" at the church door, scuttled back to his adjoining house, and the mother and son, La Sibilla still accompanying them, returned to their bereaved home.

This continued presence of the priest's house-keeper was very distasteful to Carlo. There was something about his mother's manner to him that he could not make out. She seemed thoroughly pleased to hear all about Regina,

and her son's love for her ; returned again and again to the subject of Farmer Bartoli's wealth, and always with, as it seemed to Carlo, utterly wild and baseless anticipations of the success of his suit for the rich man's daughter's hand. But with all this she seemed as if she rather wished to avoid much conversation with him ; it almost seemed as if she kept this woman Sibilla Gralli with her purposely to prevent all opportunity for it. And yet that mother and son should have much to say to each other on such an occasion seemed so natural. There had always been much more of close sympathy and similarity of nature between Carlo and his father, than between him and his mother. But their intercourse had always been perfectly loving and affectionate. Indeed, his mother's manner to him could not be said to be otherwise now, except in so far as she seemed to have no wish to talk to him. Carlo was annoyed and thoroughly mystified.

He perceived that there was not going to be any chance that he and his mother would be left alone together that evening. So after eat-

ing his supper, and reminding his mother that he should be obliged to start on his return to Lucca at mid-day on the morrow, and receiving her ready assent to his doing so, he went up stairs, again leaving the two women together.

When he got up the next morning there was no change in the weather.

“Nocte pluit totâ ; redeunt spectacula mane.”

The rain was still descending in bucketsful, as the phrase is. And very many must the bucketsful have been that had fallen in that part of central Tuscany during the last six-and-thirty hours.

None the less for this, however, did Carlo start down the mountain on his return to Lucca at the time he had named ; rather before it, indeed ; for it was necessary that he should catch the train at Pescia, and he calculated that the state of the mountain after all the rain that had fallen might be such as to make his walk into Pescia take more time than it might other-

wise have done. It was little more than half-past eleven when he bid his mother good-by ; and without any attempt on her part to detain him, set out on this not very agreeable journey.

CHAPTER III.

SERCHIO IN ANGER.

IT was still raining hard when Carlo started on his walk down the mountain. He had, of course, made up his mind for a thorough wetting ; but that was no great matter to one who from his childhood upwards had lived the life of a *contadino* of the mountains.

He soon, however, became aware that he had done wisely in allowing himself an extra half hour for his walk to Pescia. The storm, accompanied as it had been by more wind than is usual in these countries, had made great havoc in the forest. Trees had been blown down in many places, and huge boughs stripped from them, and hurled about with much damage to their neighbours in many more. In many places

also the paved pathway had been turned into the semblance of a torrent. And the wisdom of those who had many centuries ago, long before the high roads in the valleys had been made, undertaken the very considerable labour of paving these mountain tracks, was explained and manifested. For had no such precaution been taken, every semblance of a pathway would have been torn away by the waters in their headlong course towards the rivers which thread the lower valleys.

Carlo, however, encountered no serious obstruction till he reached the bridge at a sharp angle of the zig-zag road, which has been described in the last chapter. There all trace of a bridge had disappeared; not because the rocks which formed it had been carried away;—they were too huge and heavy for that;—but because the water had submerged them, so as to form a roaring cataract in the ravine beneath the path. A huge chestnut tree had fallen across the ravine, a little below the bridge; the broken branches of other trees had

been arrested by its mighty trunk as they were being washed down the mountain, and had, in their turn, closed the passage against a vast mass of stones, earth, and rubbish, sticks, dry leaves, and masses of couch grass and weeds ; and had thus formed a complete dam, converting the bottom of the ravine above it into a small lake. The size of the lake thus formed was increasing every instant ; and Carlo was obliged to retrace his steps up the steep slope of the ravine till he could find a place where it was feasible to cross it. Then he had to descend again amid the pathless wreck of the woods, till he could rejoin the paved way lower down. Similar obstructions occurred again and again before he reached the valley and the high road along it from Florence to Pescia. And when he reached this point, still a mile or two from the latter city, it was very near the time at which the train was due at the Pescia station.

He passed on, however, at the best speed he could make, fully purposed to do the distance

on foot, if he should be too late. Press on as he might, however, it was ten minutes past the time at which the train was due, when he reached the station. But it had not yet arrived ;—and he was saved, therefore, from the necessity of walking the journey before him. There were other persons waiting at the station, and as the train still did not come, speculation began to be rife among them as to the probability of delay caused by “*questo stravagante tempo*,”—this extravagant weather, as Tuscans always call any deviation from the ordinary sunshine and gentle showers of their genial climate.

There is no part of the line in the immediate vicinity of Pescia which was likely to have suffered from the water,—none between that city and Serravalle. But under the village, so called, the towers of whose ruined castles, still standing on the crest of the ridge which separates two valleys, explain and justify the name, the rail passes through a tunnel, and then leaves the great valley of the Ombrone in which Pistoia stands, to enter the Valdinievole, of which

Pescia is the chief city. Now those who were acquainted with the country on the farther side of the Serravalle ridge and tunnel shook their heads ominously at the delay of the train. They knew that the Ombrone, though not liable to such dangerous fits of sudden fury as its more violent neighbour the Serchio, was apt in a more lazy and sluggish fashion to decline the labour of conveying its waters into the Arno, whenever they were suddenly increased beyond measure by such weather as had prevailed for the last two or three days. They feared that a portion of the line in the Ombrone valley must be under water ; and if it were ... what was likely to be the case in the Lucchese lands in the valley of the Serchio ?

The train arrived, however, about twenty minutes after its time. The conductor reported that in fact the Ombrone had broken its banks, and that a wide tract of country was under water. No great damage, however, beyond the inevitable results of the submersion, had been done as yet. The water on the line was in no

place above three or four inches deep ; but it was feared that if this weather were to continue many hours longer, much worse mischief must ensue.

There was naturally great enjoyment in telling all this, with an air of much authority, to a crowd of people who knew nothing at all about it, and the conductor did not scruple to delay the train some ten minutes longer while he enjoyed it. Of course punctuality was out of the question in such a *tempo stravagante* as this, and with the waters out, too ! And ten minutes more or less were under such circumstances of no moment. So the train was at least half an hour behind its time, when it left Pescia.

When it reached the next station on the way to Lucca, at Altopascio, matters were looking much worse.

The village of Altopascio,—a name of ill omen in Florentine story, as having been the scene of one of the greatest defeats suffered by Florence, fighting against her sister republic of

Lucca,—the village of Altopascio is situated on a knoll surrounded by vast plains. The view from it stretches far away towards the foot of the Mont Pisano, where the Bientina lake, half lake and half swamp, collects the drainage of a great part of the lowest districts of the Agro Pisano. And now, almost all this vast extent of flat country was under water ; showing that the Arno had in its turn also been overtaxed by the body of waters conveyed into it by its tributaries, coming down all of them like torrents from the flanks of the upper Apennines. It was a scene of wide-spread desolation, as far as the eye could see.

The railway, however, though all this wide extent of country is seen from it, passes itself in this part of its course over rather higher ground, sufficiently so to keep it out of the reach of the flood. The Lucca lowlands are not yet visible from this part of the line.

One more station, that of Porcari, intervenes between Altopascio and Lucca ; but that place is situated among slight eminences which hide

from it the wide extent of the irrigated flats around Lucca. At Porcari, however, rumours began to be heard of probable disasters in the valley of the Serchio. Some declared that that river had already broken its banks in more than one place. Others maintained that as yet no mischief had been done; that there was every reason to fear, from one moment to another, that a catastrophe might happen, especially if the weather continued as it was.

And the rain still descended in a steady dense out-pour which gave no hope of any immediate change. People said that such a rainfall had not been known for the last twenty years,—not since the year when Serchio had carried away every bridge in the valley, save the wonderful hog-backed Devil's Bridge, the work if not of the devil, at least of builders who believed in God and devil some five hundred years ago! There was not an inch, not a glimmer of blue sky to be seen in all the extent of the heavens! Not even the indigo-coloured clouds, which usually are the rain-

bearers in this region, could be seen. All seemed one thick mist. The outlook skywards, and the outlook towards the horizon, presented one and the same appearance of sight-baffling mist.

Once again the train, now a good forty minutes late, moved on towards Lucca; while men belonging to the district,—men returning, perhaps, to wives and families in solitary farm-houses,—began to look anxiously into each other's eyes, and to crane eagerly from the windows for the first sight of the Lucca plains. It was at Porcari that the first idea of danger to his friends at Ripalta or Sponda Lunga dashed with the suddenness of a lightning flash into Carlo's mind. Still he did not imagine that there could be any real ground for alarm on that personal score. Ripalta was situated, it is true, at one of the lowest points of the plain, as indeed the name of the spot indicates,—the highness of the banks which has been found necessary for the restraint of the stream, being of course the measure of the

lowness of the level of the land below that of the surface of the river. But the bank, which was specially high at Ripalta, was also, or seemed to Carlo's judgment to be also, specially strong. There was no point in all the dykes, as he reflected, which seemed more massively constructed, in better condition, or more capable of bidding defiance to the floods. Carlo reflected on these facts, and told himself again and again that there could be no danger, at least for the house at Ripalta, even should other parts of the farm suffer.

At Sponda Lunga the chance of danger was evidently still less. The village so called stands on slightly rising ground on the convex side of an elbow of the stream. Be it where it might that the furious river should break its banks, it could hardly be there.

In a few minutes after leaving the station at Porcari the great plain of Lucca came in sight. And a deeply-breathed "ah" of relief escaped from several lips, as it was perceived that no extensive inundation had as yet taken place

there. The small canals which traverse the wide, richly cultivated fields in every direction for the purposes of irrigation, had in many places formed wide pools of some hundred feet or more in extent. But that was nothing more than was frequent at the wet season of the year, and was no great misfortune. There was no extended, no general inundation as yet.

Carlo would have given much to have been able to leave the train some little distance before it reached Lucca; for he would thus have been able, by cutting across the country, to reach the spot where his heart was sooner than he could do by being carried on to Lucca. But this of course was impossible. At last he reached Lucca; and like others who had come by the train, made eager and instant inquiry of the people at the station as to the state of the river, and the opinion as to the probability of disaster.

No mischief of importance had as yet taken place. But it was thought that a catastrophe could not be avoided if the rain should continue a few more hours. There was the greatest danger

that the banks might give way from moment to moment. There were men on watch along the dykes on both sides of the river. It was thought that unless the weather should change before nightfall, of which there was no prospect, it would almost have been better that the bank should have given way before, so that the calamity might have occurred by daylight. For it was considered certain that if the rain continued the river must break its bounds before morning ; and the terrible calamity would be enhanced by its taking place in the darkness. And now it was getting near nightfall, darkened as the sky was by the utter absence of any gleam from sun, moon, or star.

Carlo inquired hurriedly whether any fears had been felt for any locality more than another.

“Fears !” said the man he addressed, a *fattore* of the district, who had come to the station to meet his wife, who was in the train, and with whom Carlo had some slight acquaintance ;—
“Fears ! There isn’t a man who owns or sows a rood of land from the mountain-foot to the

coast that isn't all fear! And reason enough in such weather as this. There is not an inch of the plain safe betwixt here and Leghorn. I expect you may row in a boat from the Serchio to the Arno to-morrow morning, if you are minded for the trip!"

"You do not happen to have heard, signor, whether there was thought to be danger at Ripalta?" asked Carlo.

"I tell you, *figliuolo mio*, that there is danger everywhere!" returned the stout *fattore*, looking scared and anxious. "Ripalta? What, old Bartoli's?" he continued. "Oh, *he* can take care of himself, if anybody can! What would the loss of every grain, grape, and olive of the year's crop be to old Giovanni Bartoli? He is rich enough not to feel it. The water won't carry away his scudi! I *did* hear somebody say just now that the dyke at Ripalta was showing signs of a leak; but oftentimes that's nothing. Anyway, old Bartoli is out with more than twenty men. *He* won't be caught asleep!"

Carlo hurried away from the station, rather

comforted than otherwise, by what the *fattore* had said. His whole thought seemed to be of danger to the land and its produce. Nobody seemed to think anything about danger to persons. Carlo, a mountaineer, to whom floods, and inundations, and the misfortunes incidental to them, were quite new experiences of life, had, since the first idea of calamity as a consequence of the weather had flashed across his mind, been picturing to himself only the possibility of danger to Regina! There was nobody in all the country-side who could better afford to lose the harvests of a year than old Giovanni Bartoli. And Carlo owned to himself that, if it mattered not *very* much to Signor Bartoli whether such a loss fell upon him or not, it mattered still less to him, Caroli! Still he was not easy about Regina. Wholly ignorant as he was of the manner in which floods produce their disasters, and of the nature and kind of the dangers to be apprehended from them, he could not help tormenting himself with imaginations of Regina environed by every kind of danger from water.

He had some twitchings of conscience, too, which suggested that it was his duty to the widow Monaldi to give her the benefit of his presence and protection at such a season as the present. But he could not make up his mind to abstain from betaking himself at the utmost speed to Ripalta. He quieted his conscience, therefore, with the consideration that Sponda Lunga *must* be perfectly out of danger. Besides, though Ripalta was not on the way from Lucca to Sponda Lunga—not on the shortest way, that is to say—it might be taken on the way, by one following the course of the river and the dykes all along. He would go to Sponda Lunga therefore, passing by Ripalta.

What he wanted to *do*, when he was there he would have been puzzled to say ; simply to look at the old house, it would seem, and satisfy himself that the walls which held his treasure were still standing safely in their proper place !

He started from the station at Lucca at a quick walk, which soon became a run, making for the nearest point of the river banks.

Notwithstanding the weather, and the rain which did not cease for an instant, the whole population—the whole male population, at least, and a good part of the female population also—seemed to be afoot and out of doors. Had it been the loveliest summer day that ever *festa* was favoured with, the people could not have been abroad in greater numbers. The interests at stake were too general, and the anxiety anent them too intense, to admit of the poor people remaining quietly at home.

When he reached the top of the dyke the numbers of people assembled were greater still. Men were running to and fro anxiously scanning the outside of the banks, measuring from time to time the height to which the water had reached, marking each result with ominous shakings of the head, and anxiously scanning from time to time the horizon towards the mountains. Others were bringing faggots and brushwood, of which a great quantity had already been collected, to the top of the dyke. Some were preparing sharpened stakes, and huge sheets of

canvas, ready to be used in the stopping of any partial giving way of the dyke.

Many also were employed in moving to and fro on the top of the dyke, busy in keeping a strict watch on the proceedings of their neighbours. It is one of the great evils of such a state of things as is produced by the condition of very many of the great rivers of Italy, which have been walled in by dykes ever growing higher from generation to generation, as the bed of the river is raised by the deposit of the earth it brings with it from the mountains,—it is one of the greatest evils of this state of things, I say, that it results in a keen perception by the dwellers on the banks that in such time of danger as has been here described, one man's misfortune may be his neighbour's salvation. When the river is in such a state of flood that there is no longer any hope that its banks will be able to contain the waters, and when every man is fearing that the imminent breakage will be on *his* land, and every village community is fearing that their commune will be the one to

be overwhelmed, it is impossible that it should not occur to those watching the rising flood, that if the press of waters were to be relieved by a breakage at any one point, the lands at all other points would be all the safer. And from wishing such a thing to happen, to aiding it to happen is but a step, and a very short one ! Hence has not unfrequently arisen the crime of *tapping* the banks of the threatening stream ; and always arises the suspicion and fear that such a measure may be resorted to. And, of course, the amount of neighbourly ill-feeling and suspicion, the quarrelling, and often the violent riots and broils that arise from this source, are very great. And on every occasion of danger from flood great vigilance is exercised for the mutual prevention of such a crime.

On the immense dykes between which the Po is conducted in an artificial channel raised above the level of the broad, rich plains of lower Lombardy, practices such as those alluded to are more known than in Tuscany. And fierce broils and battles between commune and com-

mune have occurred in those districts from this cause. But on the occasion of the more than usual danger from the swollen Serchio, in the well-remembered autumn here spoken of, similar suspicions were rife in men's minds, and the whole river-bordering population was on the alert, to see that no man attempted to escape his own share of the common misfortune, by involving his neighbours in ruin.

As Carlo drew near to Ripalta, he got the most contradictory answers to his repeated questions from the people on the dyke. The river had made a breach at this or that point, and the lands of Ripalta were all under water! The dwelling-house was safe! The dwelling-house was submerged up to the first floor! No breach had yet taken place in the dyke, but was expected from moment to moment! *Che, che!* Ripalta was in no danger! The Ripalta dykes were the most solid in the country!

Rumour was active, and, as ever, mendacious in exact proportion to its activity. It was clear

that no real information was attainable. Carlo pushed on with increasing anxiety, elbowing his way through the crowds gathered here and there at the points where immediate danger was specially apprehended.

At last he came in sight of that part of the dyke, which was immediately over the garden terrace, sacred to him from so many memories, and over the house of Ripalta. The first thing that he could see was that a large crowd was gathered on the spot. It was a bad sign. The people were there either because mischief was urgently apprehended, or because it had already occurred. Carlo dashed in among the thickest of the crowd. Nothing had yet happened. There was the terrace, there was the little chapel, the farm-yard, and the house, and the home fields, all as he had last left them, save that then they were basking in sleepy sunshine, and were now seen through the thickly-beating rain, and under the *morne* light of a starless twilight, which was rapidly becoming dark night.

The river was rushing and roaring more fearfully, Carlo thought, than at any spot of its course along which he had passed. The foaming waters heavily charged with earth, and continually bringing down evidences of all sorts of havoc, worked higher up the valley, reached to within a foot of the top of the dyke. And they were rising every minute!

“Is it thought that there is danger of the dyke breaking here?” asked Carlo breathlessly of a man who appeared to be carefully measuring the rise of the river with his eye.

The man looked up at him surprised.

“Ah! you are a stranger in these parts!” he said. “But I should have thought that any child could see that with half an eye! Danger? Look at that river! In a quarter of an hour it will be running where that house stands, as it is running here now!”

“Good God!” exclaimed Carlo, turning pale. “Where is Farmer Bartoli? Is he here?”

“Do you know him? Humph! He is down at Saint Martin’s sluices. Word was brought

that the river had broken bank there ; and he went off to see what could be done to save the cattle in Saint Martin's meadow."

"The dyke has given way at Saint Martin's?" asked Carlo.

"I don't think so. I think the news was false," said the man he was speaking to ; "for there has been no fall of the water here ; and there would have been for awhile, at least, if the bank had been broken below."

"Would it not be better to send after him, and call him here?"

"Humph ! I suppose he knows his own business best. It depends which he values most, his bullocks or his daughter," said the man, with a gruff laugh.

"Gracious heaven ! Is the Signorina Bartoli in the house there, and nobody with her?" cried Carlo, aghast with terror.

"Why where should she be ? I suppose she has got old Caterina with her. All the men folk are on the dyke, of course ! If the Signorina Regina wanted people to think of her when she

was in trouble, she should ha' thought more of them at other times!" said the fellow, sulkily.

"God in heaven! And the waters may be over the house in another minute!" cried Carlo, springing forward as he spoke, to bound down those steps in the side of the dyke, close by the little chapel, by which he had so often descended in a very different mood of mind.

But as he was in the act of throwing himself down the side of the embankment, he was seized by a powerful arm, whether that of the man who had just before been speaking to him, or another, he did not know, and plucked violently backward.

"Here it comes!"

"The dyke is going! The dyke is going!"

"Look to yourselves, all of you!" he heard, amid the outcry of a hundred voices.

"Come all to this side! All here! and be ready with a hand to the sheets and the faggots!" called out above the din the same voice that had been speaking with Carlo.

And in the same instant, before he could

recover himself from the impulsion of the force with which he had been dragged backwards, Carlo found himself in the midst of the crowd, and saw the top of the dyke dissolve itself, as it were, so as to open a passage to the water. At first only a channel of the depth of a foot or two below the surface of the water was opened; and through this the waters poured as through a mill sluice, rushing down on to the terrace walk and garden below.

Great efforts were made by means of the brushwood and faggots that had been collected, and by spreading across the breach the great canvas sheets, to dam up this channel, and, if possible, to prevent it from becoming larger. But it was very soon evident that this latter hope was vain. The waters rushing through the breach with terrible violence, opened a larger outlet for themselves from moment to moment. And it became very clear that all the means provided were utterly insufficient for the end in view. The garden, the farm-yard, the out-buildings of Ripalta were evidently

doomed, as far as submersion could avail to destroy them.

Then it became a question how far the house itself was in danger. Some said that the house would stand safe enough ; that the ground-floor would be water-logged ; but that there was no possibility that the waters should reach the upper floor. But then some one who knew the house spoke of the vast cellarage under it. This would, of course, be entirely filled, and there was great probability—almost a certainty, indeed—that the water would burst up the vaulting of the range of cellars. And it might be doubtful whether the injury to the old fabric caused by this violence might not be sufficient to render the foundations unable to resist the pressure on them.

Carlo had, when the dyke first began to give way, strenuously laboured to assist in the attempt to stem the torrent by means of faggots and canvas. All such scenes and matters were new to him. But in the excitement of the moment, and in that eager desire to *do* some-

what to meet the danger, which men are so apt to feel in such cases, he had thrown himself with fury into the work in which he saw others engaged. Then, when it became evident that all the efforts were unavailing, and the crowd ceasing from them stood with excited faces gazing at the devastation which they were powerless to check, Carlo heard such speculations as the above as they passed from mouth to mouth, and felt as if turned to stone at the thought of Regina's position, as he heard them.

The breach in the dyke was by this time sufficiently large to admit the passage of a body of water equal in volume to a small river, and the torrent rushed with terrible violence into the low ground, foaming, raving, and dashing itself into spray against the walls of the old house. Already the farm-yard and garden around it were turned into a lake, the waters of which were rapidly rising every instant.

For a few moments he remained wildly

gazing at the scene, and striving to bring his mind to bear with some approach to calmness on the question what best could be done for the extrication of Regina from her position.

But any such calm thinking was impossible to him. The circumstances, the danger, the extent of it, the nature of it, were all new to him. He was ignorant of the proper means of dealing with or struggling against it. He was like a landsman in a time of danger at sea.

To remain standing there inactive, looking at the waters as they raged round the house, rising higher and higher every instant, knowing that one a thousand times dearer to him than himself was shut up within that prison ; that she was there alone with none to help ; that she was perhaps even then thinking of him and wishing that his arm was there to save her—to stand there inactive while she was within a few hundred yards of him, and with these thoughts whirling through his brain, became impossible to him.

He had, however, sufficient self-command and perception of the nature of the phenomena around him to know that to have any chance of reaching the house, he must avoid the immediate rush of the stream, which was now billowing through the breach of the dyke with the violence and body of water of a mill-race. He ran up the dyke, therefore, a few yards to the spot where it overhung the extremity of the terrace walk, and there, regardless of the outcries and warnings of the crowd, he dashed down the side of the embankment into the water. He was wholly unable to swim, and had the water been already out of his depth, must inevitably have been lost. It was not so as yet, however, though rapidly increasing in depth. But it was already fully up to his chest, and it was with the utmost difficulty that he could keep his feet. The difficulty of doing this was the greater from the circumstance that he was altogether unprepared for it. He had no idea of the degree in which water in violent movement and heavily charged with earthy

matter is capable of puzzling and baffling even a strong man struggling with it.

With much difficulty he reached the door of the house. The water reached more than half way to the top of it. An attempt had been made hastily on the first threatening of danger to defend it in some degree by a rapidly raised wall of bricks laid on each other edgeways with plaster of Paris cement. It was impossible to open the door. Carlo managed to ring the bell; called aloud, and beat at the upper portion of the door, while holding on by one of those huge iron rings, which are often found by the side of the entrances to old Italian houses.

Presently he heard the voice of old Caterina speaking to him from an upper window; and in the next instant saw Regina herself at the same window.

“Carlo! Carlo! Is it possible? Is it you? Thanks be to God and to the blessed Madonna, for your coming here! My good Carlo! If everybody forgot your poor Regina, you would not forget her.”

“How is it possible to get to you, *Regina mia, tesoro del mio cuore*? How can I get into the house?”

“If you could get round to the garden side, the water will be less deep there than here. Then you could climb into the *loggia*. With a rope to help you, it would be easy. If only you can get round.”

But Carlo was already making the attempt. He got to the angle of the house very well, but there, in consequence of a sudden difference in the level of the soil, so violent a current was sweeping along the side of the house, in such sort as to meet him as he tried to round the corner, that he was taken off his legs; and had it not been for the bars of a window, by which he was fortunately holding on by his hands, it would have gone hard with him. By this help, however, he made his way against the current round the corner of the building, and having accomplished that, found less difficulty in the remainder of the task of reaching the *loggia*, looking into the garden. From this, Regina,

aided by old Caterina, had already thrown a rope made fast round one of the columns; and thus assisted, Carlo found little difficulty in clambering into the *loggia*.

“We are all alone,” said Regina, as he landed himself on the floor of the *loggia*, “father has gone to St. Martin’s meadow to look after the cattle. He never guessed that there was any danger in this part of the dyke. It was thought to be the strongest bit of dyke anywhere about. Oh! how thankful I am to you for coming to us! I thought you were at Uzzano. I dare not ask you for news of your journey.”

“It was all over, dearest, hours before I got there. My poor dear father died very shortly after my mother wrote. But those are subjects for another time. The question now is, what can be done to get you away from this place?”

“Get me away, Carlo!” replied she, looking at him with great surprise, “what do you mean? What can you be thinking of? Why should I go away? Indeed, how could I leave the house till the water subsides?”

“ You must come away, and that at once ! Dearest Regina, you are in great danger here—a danger increasing every moment ! ”

“ You frighten me, Carlo ! What danger can there be to any one in this house ? ”

“ Danger to the house itself, Regina—danger that the house may be borne down from its foundations by the waters.”

“ *Che ! che ! amico mio !* It is not so bad as that. This old house is solid, built as they used to build in the old time. There can be no danger here.”

“ Dearest, you deceive yourself ! The immense cellars will be filled with water—are, no doubt, full now. Then the still rising water will in all probability burst up the vaulting, and then who knows whether the old walls would resist the pressure ? ”

“ *Dice bene, il Signor Carlo !* ” put in the old servant ; “ *Pur troppo*, the cellars are full of water ! I went down ”

“ Hark ! ” cried Carlo, raising his finger, “ hark ! What is that ? ”

Regina turned very pale as, one after the other, three dull-sounding reports were heard, as it seemed to them immediately under their feet. The sound was like that of a cannon heard at a great distance. And each report was followed by a noise like that of water disturbed by large masses thrown into it. But the sensation was far more terrible than the mere sound. The vibration caused by the shock was very unmistakably felt, and the entire building seemed to tremble to its foundations.

“*Santa Madonna! abbia pietà di noi! Misericordia!*” cried old Caterina, falling on her knees, and vociferating as she crossed herself again and again.

“It is the bursting up of the vaults! It is the danger I was telling you of, Regina. You must come away at once!” said Carlo, hurriedly, in an under voice, as if he feared to be overheard by the malicious power that was working this evil.

“*Santa Madonna aiutaci!*” cried Regina, who seemed, however, to put her practical trust

in Carlo rather than in the Madonna, for she cowered up close to his side, and seized his arm with both her hands.

“Regina! *anima di mia vita!* my life! my love!” cried Carlo, passing his arm round her waist, and pressing her to his side, “do not be terrified. I am here! I am with you! But there is no time to lose. You must come away from the house at once.”

“But how, Carlo *mio?* How can I go through that water? I shall be drowned!”

“I can get you through. I will support you. It is not so deep. The difficulty is to keep your feet; and two are better than one for that. We shall help each other. Come, dearest, come at once.”

“But how can we get out of the house? It is impossible to open the door!”

“We must go as I came. You must cling to the rope, and let yourself down into the water. I shall be below to catch you. If you fall, it is not like falling on land; you will fall on the water, and not hurt yourself. Anything is

better than staying to be crushed under the ruins of the house. Come, dearest—dearest Regina!”

He led her to the column of the *loggia* to which the rope he had climbed up by still remained attached, and showed her how to hold it, and to assist herself by it in descending into the water—a distance of not more than eight or nine feet. And then he took the rope in his hands, to help himself down by it.

“But you won’t leave *me*, Signor Carlo! You won’t abandon me, all by myself, to be drowned in this house, like a rat in a hole!” whimpered poor old Caterina.

“Somebody shall come for you. If nobody else comes first, I will come back for you. I promise you that I will. But it is impossible for me to take two at a time. Do not be afraid, Caterina, *poverina!* I swear to you that you shall be brought away!”

And so saying, Carlo easily jumped down into the water, which was, on that side of the house, not more than four feet deep. But, as

he noticed, it had been less when he had reached the house.

Regina got safely on to the cornice outside of the parapet wall of the *loggia*, holding fast by the rope. But having accomplished that much, she was at a loss what to do next, and stood looking down at Carlo in the thick muddy water below, and hesitating to make the jump.

“If the rope puzzles you, dearest, let it go, and simply jump into the water, you will not be hurt. But we have no time to lose; it is getting deeper every minute. Jump, dearest! I will catch you.”

Just at that moment another explosion was heard from the cellar, less violent than the preceding ones; but it had the effect of deciding the frightened girl to make the needful jump. Quitting the rope, and stretching out her arms towards Carlo, she sprang, and, falling into the water close by his side, received no other harm than a complete wetting. He had not been able to prevent her from so falling, as for a moment to be plunged over her head into the water.

But the next moment he had her standing up by his side, with his arm round her waist. The over-head-and-ears plunge, however, the motion of the water all around her, the tendency of it to take her legs from under her, the newness of the whole scene and sensation, so dazed and bewildered her that she almost lost the consciousness of what she was about. And it was with great difficulty that Carlo, half carrying, half leading, half dragging her through the water, was enabled to get her first to the garden terrace, and thence to the top of the dyke. Nothing, save the great strength and vigour and tall stature of the young mountaineer, would have rendered the feat possible.

When he reached the terrace, pausing for a moment to recover his breath, as he stood with his burthen, half fainting in his arms, in the less deep water of that higher level, he shouted to the people on the top of the dyke, who had been watching his progress, that the old servant was still in the house—that the vaults were burst up—and that somebody must go and

fetch her away. None of those on the dyke seemed disposed to undertake the task; and Carlo thought that he should have to recommence his work under somewhat less inspiring circumstances. But just at that moment a young *contadino* came along the dyke, who was at once recognised by several of the bystanders as old Caterina's son.

“*Ohe, Cecco!*” cried one, “here is a chance of a washing for you! There's your mother in *casa Bartoli*, there all alone! They fear the house is coming down, and the old woman has nobody to help her away.”

Cecco waited for no further instructions, but dashed into the water.

“You must go round to the garden front of the house,” cried Carlo from the terrace, as the young man came down the dyke, “and there you will find a rope by which you can climb into the *loggia*. I left your mother there. Make haste, for the water is still rising!”

Then Carlo, after his few moments of pause, set himself to what was perhaps the most diffi-

cult part of his task—the getting of Regina up the steep side of the dyke through the rush of earth and rubbish-charged water. The people at the top held out to him the end of a long pole—the only means of assistance that chanced to be at hand. And at last, panting, and almost exhausted, he reached the top, with Regina, half fainting, in his arms.

He would fain have made his way at once through the crowd, which still remained watching the water careering through the breach in the dyke, and speculating on the probable fate of Farmer Bartoli's house, but it was absolutely necessary, as well for his own sake as that of Regina, to pause for a few moments.

A salvo of "*bravos*" and "*evvivas*" had saluted him as he reached the top of the bank. But having thus expressed their first feeling, they began, as Tuscans always do, to criticise.

"What did he bring the girl out of the house at all for? She was safe enough there!" said one.

"I suppose he liked the job," sneered another.

“ A very little more of the job, and he would never have wanted another ; nor she, neither, I reckon,” said a third.

“ I wonder what the farmer will say to it ? ”

“ Shame he was not here ! ”

“ A man can't be in two places at once ! He is looking after the cattle.”

“ Shouldn't wonder if he didn't thank this young Caroli, at all, for taking his girl out of the house that way.”

“ Likely enough he has saved her life ! Oh, *scusi Signore*,” continued the last speaker, addressing Carlo, “ were the vaults of the cellars burst up ? ”

“ Yes ; we heard them going off like cannon-shots, as we stood on the *loggia*,” said Carlo.

“ Then you did wisely to come away and bring the signorina with you. I'll lay a bet the house don't stand till morning ! ”

Regina was by this time a little bit recovered, and Carlo was anxious to get her, drenched to the skin and shivering as she was, into some shelter. He knew of no better plan than to

take her to Signora Monaldi, at Sponda Lunga. The distance was not great, and perhaps the walk thither was as good treatment for Regina as any that could be devised.

“Can you walk now, dearest?” he whispered to her, pressing her hand which was in his, as he spoke.

“Yes, Carlo! I can walk, but where can I go? What can I do? Where can I find father? How can we help poor Caterina?”

“Her son is gone to her; he will bring her away. The best thing will be for you to come to the widow Monaldi’s at Sponda Lunga. It is not far. The walk will warm you a little. Will you try, my heart’s treasure?” he whispered in her ear.

“Oh, I am not afraid of the walk. I am quite well, barring being wet, and my things so heavy with water and mud. But”

“But what, dearest? What can we do better? What is your objection?”

“Only that” and Regina made a little inarticulate grumbling sound between her closed

lips accompanied by a twist of her pretty shoulders, while a tinge of colour came into her pale cheek “only that it is like going to your house, you know !”

This was still said in a whisper ; and Carlo answered in the same tone, speaking urgently and seriously.

“Not so ! not a bit, signora ! I do not even live in the house ! My quarters are in a different building at the back of the house. The Signora Marta will take all care of you. And you must go somewhere !”

So Regina got up from the bank on which she had sat down on scrambling up out of the water, and allowed Carlo to lead her out of the crowd, and along the bank towards Sponda Lunga. The rain had by this time at length ceased. But the night was as dark as pitch. They could not see the river as they walked ; but they heard it all the way roaring and grumbling and splashing at their side. They were weary, exhausted, not less from the emotions they had gone through than from

bodily exertion, wet and chilled to the marrow of their bones and yet, wonderful to say, the impression remained with both of them, that their walk that night was the pleasantest *passeggiata* that either of them had ever had.

While standing at the back door of the widow's cottage, which was the one usually opened after nightfall, Carlo before knocking at it, took the cold and dripping figure of the girl in his arms, and gave and received one kiss from the blue cold lips, that made the inundation and its consequences appear to him to be a heaven-sent blessing.

“You have saved my life, Carlo,” she whispered in his ear; “and it is and shall be yours, and yours only.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE DREAM.

THE rain ceased an hour or two after sundown on the evening of the flood, after having been incessantly falling for more than forty hours. But it was still several hours more before the waters began to abate. Very large quantities of rain had fallen on the Apennines, and every mountain torrent still continued to bring down more than the ordinary water-courses could carry off to the sea.

The sun, therefore, when he arose on the following morning, looking brilliantly beaming out of a cloudless turquoise-coloured sky, just as if nothing amiss had happened since he had last shown his face, lighted up many a wide waste of waters and many a scene of ruin. The

valley of the Serchio and the flat country around Lucca were still covered with water.

In the hill country, and at Uzzano the case was different. There things returned to their ordinary appearance much more quickly. The crisis of the flood had been, as will be remembered, on the evening of the day on which Carlo Caroli had left Uzzano. The next morning in the little hill town, the sky was bright, the air was clear, and all the pleasanter for the rainfall, and everybody was busied with their usual avocations.

The widow Barbara Caroli, however, arose that day bent on an undertaking very much out of the usual tenor of her life. She was meditating nothing less than an expedition to Florence. The Signora Sibilla Gralli stepped over from the priest's house early; and it was evident that the projected expedition had been undertaken with her privity and approbation.

“Well, Signora Barbara!” she said as she entered the house, “who is in the right now? You thought that the rain yesterday was a

sign as the Saints did not approve your going. But I knew better! And now look at the weather! If ever you could have a morning as said plainer that Heaven meant it for travelling in, *I* don't understand anything about it. But I suppose you are convinced now!"

"Well, yes; I suppose it is all right! I put up a candle to Saint Barbara last night, and blew at it for going and not going. And not going blew it out directly! Yes! I suppose the Saints intend me to go!"

"Why, when *I* tell you so! I suppose you will own I ought to know! There is the train at ten o'clock, gets to Florence at half-past twelve. I suppose you will go by that?"

"Yes, I suppose that will be best."

"And be sure you go straight to my brother's at once; you have got the address in writing, in case you forget it, No. 50 on the bridge."

"Yes, I shan't forget!"

"And, of course, you won't let another soul see it! That would spoil all, you know!"

"Trust me for that!"

“And you will be back by this evening, I suppose?”

“Oh, yes; what should I do in Florence? I shall be glad to be back again as soon as possible. I shall be here by the five o'clock train, most likely.”

“Well, then, a happy journey to you, and good luck, Signora Barbara! I must be going back to his reverence.”

Soon after this conversation, the widow Barbara started on her walk down the mountain to Pescia, to join the train. But for the due understanding of the purpose of her journey, and of some of the words of the widow's conversation with her gossip La Sibilla, it will be necessary to go back to the old Casa Trendi, in the Uzzano main street, on the night of the day on which Francesco Caroli had died, and on which the Signora Barbara had a few hours previously written to her son.

The Signora Caroli had pretty well known that her husband was dying, when she wrote that letter to her son. But she had not imagined that the end was so near. She was

alone in the old house with him, when he died, sinking at last quite suddenly, and passing away without any struggle or apparent consciousness. Her gossip, Sibilla Gralli, had come in not long afterwards, and had found her friend in the act of giving way to all that loud manifestation of vociferous grief to which southern natures are so prone. The duties of the Signora Sibilla to the Rev. Don Pasquale Mommi, the arch-priest of Uzzano, her cousin and employer, would not permit her to remain with the widow during the night. But an old woman was found to undertake this duty. And the Signora Barbara was with some difficulty after awhile persuaded to go to bed. The Signora Sibilla went home to her duties at the parsonage, and the dilapidated and dreary old "Casa Trendi" was shut up for the night, with the widow, the old watcher, and the corpse, as its sole inmates.

Under such circumstances it would not have been surprising, if the imagination of any woman so situated had been excited, and dis-

posed to play some of those strange tricks by which poor mortals are so often fooled. But the Italians, though imaginative enough in some respects, are very little so in this sort. And imagination, being but a reproducing faculty, can but represent in fresh grouping those images and ideas with which the mind in its more sober moments is habitually occupied. Thus the nervous excitement of the Signora Barbara Caroli took the form of prompting her to dream of *numbers*—certain numbers which of course were at once understood to be the numbers which would come up out of the wheel at the next drawing of the state lottery.

Yes! there was no mistake about it! She dreamed that she saw luminously emblazoned on the wall of the chamber opposite to her as she lay in her bed the numbers "19, 26, 87." There were other numbers on the wall, but they were hazy, indistinct, and illegible. The figure of her departed husband was standing by the spot, and was pointing earnestly to the above three numbers.

The dreaming woman waked, and after a few minutes' reflection rose from her bed, and finding a fragment of charcoal in the long fireless hearth, scrawled with it on the door of the room those three numbers, "19, 26, 87."

She listened at the door of the chamber for a minute ; but all was profoundly still in the death chamber below. In all probability the old watcher was sleeping as placidly and only somewhat less profoundly than the figure which was taking its long repose by her side.

Signora Caroli returned to her bed ; again slept, and again dreamed very unmistakably of the same numbers. Again she saw "19, 26, 87" emblazoned in light on the wall. Again the form of her dead husband stood by them. But this time his action was more energetic. He covered the other indistinct numbers with his hand, shaking his head frowningly as he did so. Then, pointing to the plainly legible three numbers, he nodded violently, and tapped with his forefinger on them again and again with concentrated expression.

Again the widow waked ; and again she assured herself by reflection of the certainty of the dream. The completeness of the warning, according to universally recognised opinion, required, however, that the dream should be repeated yet a third time. The widow slept again ; and lo ! it was so. Again the designated numbers were presented to her, this time repeated again and again all over the wall!!!

It became very serious. A better defined and less doubtful case of revelation was scarcely ever known. Dreams are the means, as is well known, by which the supernal powers are in the habit of communicating on many subjects with favoured mortals. But, as is notorious throughout Italy, there is no subject upon which revelations are more frequently vouchsafed in this manner than the lottery. It might seem at first sight as if such private and exclusive information involved something in the nature of a wrong and a fraud. But it is to be remembered that the party who has

to pay the lottery prizes is only "the government." And as to where "the government" gets the money to pay with, why you might just as well ask where the skies get the rain from which they water the earth with! There is nothing the Madonna and the Saints think so much of as cash, in the behalf of their special disciples and favourites. And the common way in which they enrich them is by giving them a hint of the winning numbers in the lottery.

Often it happens, either in consequence of the Saint carelessly expressing himself indistinctly, or else from some subsequent arrangement of the lottery drawing, made at the last moment with special views by superior celestial authority, the information vouchsafed turns out unavailable. But there never was a finer or better defined case of revelation than that of the Signora Barbara. And the widow arose in the morning full of meditation on the subject, to the entire exclusion of all other matters.

In order, however, that the nature of the

information thus vouchsafed to the widow, and the full value of it may be rightly understood and appreciated by the English reader, it is necessary to explain very briefly the nature and system of the Italian government lotteries. Every week, sometimes in one of the principal cities and sometimes in another, the lottery is drawn. An upholstery-adorned scaffold is prepared. Civic magistrates in their official dresses are in attendance ; a band of music also ; and two little boys in gorgeous attire stand at either side of a machine like a revolving butter churn. These children take from this wheel one by one the scrolls which have been placed in it in the presence of the public, and hand them to the magistrate, who declares the result. The part of the system most necessary to be explained, however, is this. The numbers put into the wheel are ninety, and ninety only ; every number from one to ninety. Five numbers only are drawn from the wheel, and then the drawing is over. Now upon these five events it is

evident that a vast variety of bets may be made, and combinations of chances speculated on. Simplest case of all—I go to the lottery office and buy a ticket bearing five numbers selected at my pleasure between one and ninety. And I pay any sum I please, betting such sum on the event that one of my five numbers shall be one of the five numbers drawn from the wheel. This is an “*estratto semplice*.” Or I take five numbers and bet that one of them shall be the first or the second number drawn from the wheel, and so on. “*Estratto semplice determinato*.” Or I may bet that two of my numbers come up—an “*ambo* ;” or that three come up—a “*terno*.” It is evident, in short, that the combinations possible are very numerous. But the favourite form of gambling is to go for an “*estratto semplice*” or for a “*terno*.” Of course in the latter case the winnings bear an enormously higher proportion to the sum risked. In every case, however, the prizes are so calculated that the winner receives as nearly as may be fifteen

per cent. less than he ought to do, if the gambling were conducted on perfectly equable terms. It is to be observed also, that in this system, there is no such thing as an applicant not being able to have the ticket asked for because it has been sold. One man may take numbers one to five, and a dozen others may select the same. But the government reserves to itself the right of declaring all stakes off at any time before the drawing, in case there may have chanced such a run upon the same numbers as might, in the event of such numbers coming up, cause a greater loss to the exchequer than the government cares to face.

It was very evident that the celestial powers who had so benignly condescended to reveal to Signora Barbara Caroli the knowledge they naturally possessed, by virtue of *being* celestial powers, respecting the issue of the next lottery drawing—it was very evident, I say, that the supernal powers intended that the widow should go for a “*terno*.” I believe, indeed, that the

saints rarely condescend to play for anything under that. And Signora Sibilla Gralli, who from her position in the priest's household was necessarily a great authority upon all such subjects, declared, when consulted on the point in the morning, that it would be a gross sin not to profit to the utmost by the proffered good-will of heaven.

Profit to the utmost! Yes! it was easy to say profit to the utmost! But the Saints are never known to provide the means of buying a ticket! The lottery officers are inexorable in requiring the stipulated amount of cash down. And the supernal powers have never been known, even in the best authenticated and most remarkable cases of lottery revelation, to take upon themselves this part of the business. The gambler must provide the price of his ticket in cash by mortal and sublunary means. Too often the means adopted are indeed *sub-lunary* to the exclusion of *sub-solar* methods of raising the wind.

Poor Signora Barbara Caroli, however, had

no idea of turning into one of the moon's minions, and taking a purse on the road, even if the Uzzano roads had been productive of such things. And how was the money for the purchase of a lottery ticket on any such scale, as would do honour to the heavenly revelation vouchsafed to her, to be found? She was absolutely without any ready cash. The last illness of her husband, and the small expenses connected with his funeral, had left her absolutely penniless. Carlo, indeed, had promised to send her a supply at the end of the month. But if the heavenly warning was to be put to profit, the need was immediate. It was on a Monday evening that Francesco Caroli died. It was on that night that the important dream was dreamed. It was on the Wednesday evening that the deceased was buried. It was on the Thursday that Carlo returned to Lucca. And it was on the Friday morning that Signora Caroli was about to start for Florence. And the lottery was to be drawn on the Saturday; tickets being to

be purchased up to the latest hour on the Friday night.

The consultation, therefore, between the widow and her confidante, during that hour while Carlo had gone out, had turned mainly on the financial question. But short time had been given to any examination of the dream. Sibilla Gralli at once pronounced it authentic and of the highest value. It was the more important and unmistakeable, that high authority declared, from the fact of the dream having come while the dead man was lying in the house. Doubtless none other than her lost husband himself was the informant. Doubtless it was to his fond care for her welfare that this valuable information was due. That the departed spirit of the late Signor Caroli should on passing from the body immediately become aware of the numbers which would be taken at hazard from the wheel at Rome on the following Saturday, was too self-evident to need even an instant's thought. In short, it was the bounden duty of the widow to put the

good information to the utmost possible profit. But how to find the means of doing so! That was the question!

The Signora Sibilla herself could give no aid in this department. She abounded in counsel, but was wholly devoid of cash. She at first recommended that, as a matter of course, the good dream should be communicated to Carlo; and that he should be called on for aid in the turning of it to account. But Signora Caroli had manifested the utmost reluctance to speak to her son on the subject at all. She knew that he would not only ridicule and disbelieve her dream entirely, but would be very strongly opposed to her meddling with the lottery at all. The Signora Sibilla groaned over the increasing infidelity and atheism of the rising generation of young men, and did not speak any more of admitting Signor Carlo to their counsels.

When Carlo left the two women together on the second night of his visit to Uzzano—the night of his father's funeral—they were still eagerly discussing the subject of ways and

means. And as soon as they judged him to have gone to sleep, and the house was perfectly quiet, they rose to make a thorough perquisition in search of anything by the sale or pawning of which the needed sum of money could be raised.

Now, in the large old-fashioned chamber in which the late Signor Caroli and his wife had slept during all the years of their married life, there was in the thickness of the wall, close to the husband's side of the bed, a little narrow closet, with a tiny window in it, a chair and a desk. Such places are by no means uncommon in Italian houses, the great thickness of the walls generally used having, in all probability, first suggested the construction of them. Probably the intended object of such retreats was for prayer ; and in more prayerful days they were no doubt used for that purpose. Perhaps Signor Caroli used the one in his house for that purpose ; perhaps it served him merely as a place where he might, when he wished it, be alone. However it might be, it had always been considered as his especial *sanctum*, and he

had been in the habit of keeping it locked. The key however was easily found ; and the two women, not without a certain sense of awe and of wrong-doing, penetrated into the tiny chamber.

There was very little of any sort in it. An old arm-chair occupying the entire width of the space in such sort that when it was drawn forward the door could not be opened ; an old sloping writing-shelf in front, similarly occupying the whole width of the recess ; an old dry ink-stand on this, and a few fragments of paper lying about, were all that was to be seen, with one exception. On the wall, over the writing-shelf, hung an ivory crucifix. It was rather a large one, some twenty inches or two feet in height. The crucified figure of the Saviour was of ivory, and the cross of ebony. Signora Caroli had not seen this crucifix for many years ; but she at once recollected that it had been one of the very few possessions of her late husband at the time of their marriage, and that he had always valued it very highly.

The two women stopped short and looked at each other for a moment with speaking eyes, but with silent tongues.

“It was his before we married!” said Signora Barbara at last, putting out her hand to take the crucifix from its place on the wall. “It is ever so long since I saw it. I know he always valued it! I suppose,” she added, after a pause, and looking cautiously and enquiringly into the face of the Signora Sibilla, “I suppose that it is of no value to speak of.”

The Signora Sibilla put out her hand eagerly to take the crucifix, and examined it attentively.

“I do not know,” she said; “I am not sure; I am not *capace* in such matters. But my notion is that this crucifix is worth money. And anyway I know where to find one who would know, and would tell one in a minute.”

“You don’t say so!” said Signora Caroli, looking frightened at the suggestion that presented itself to her mind. “You don’t say so! But I should not like, you know, . . . I shouldn’t

feel comfortable like to ask anybody. Why, who, now, could I ask ?”

“ Oh, somebody that will think nothing about it ; somebody that never heard of you, and that you never heard of ; somebody far away from here !”

“ *Santa Madonna*, Sibilla ! Who can you mean ?” said the proprietress of the object in question, looking on it with greedy eyes.

“ Well ! I will tell you what I mean, Barbara. It’s my brother,—my own brother.”

“ I never heard that you had a brother, Signora Sibilla !”

“ Well, I have. He is a jeweller and dealer in antiquities on the jewellers’ bridge at Florence. He would know in a minute what this is worth. He is a good man, and would tell you true. And if it is worth anything he would most likely buy it himself. I have seen much money—ever so much—given for such things sometimes. And, I can’t tell, but it looks to me as if this was like one of them carvings of the old time that is thought so much of.”

“You don’t say so!” repeated the other, gazing at her friend open-eyed. “But, Sibilla, I should be afraid!”

“Afraid! Signora Barbara! What of, in the name of Heaven?”

“Why” and the Signora Caroli looked up and down, and right and left, and finally dropped her eyes on the floor,—“Why, afraid of selling his crucifix and he not in his grave yet! I am afraid it would be a sin!”

“I should think I ought to know most about that!” returned the Signora Sibilla, severely, “and I living with his reverence the arch-priest now these fifteen years! I think I ought to know something about sins! Sin! Why it is flying in the face of Heaven not to profit by the warning as you have had! Don’t you think that your blessed husband meant you to raise the money for the numbers, and he a coming from his grave to show ’em to you. I’ll tell you what would be a sin, Signora Barbara. It would be a sin to let his good-will and Heaven’s providence go for nothing! If it was for any other

purpose, I don't say! But when he, as told you these numbers, is a lying in the house, and guiding you at this minute to this blessed crucifix, as you knew nothing about, I do say that your duty is clear enough."

"But what would you have me do then, Signora Sibilla?" said the widow, timidly, but yet evidently encouraged by her friend's words.

"Do! Why take the crucifix in your hand, wrap it up carefully, and as soon as ever Signor Carlo is gone to-morrow morning, go with it to Florence, and show it to Stefano Gralli on the Ponte Vecchio."

"Go to Florence!" said the widow, in amazement.

"Yes, go to Florence! What else? Why not?"

"But the expense! Any way the crucifix can not be worth much more than what it would cost me to get to Florence and back again," objected the widow, timidly.

"*Che!* not worth more! If that is what I

take it to be, you will get more than a couple of hundred francs for it !”

“ A couple of hundred francs !” said the widow, in tones hardly above her breath ; “ a couple of hundred francs ! Sibilla, it seems as if I was stealing it !”

“ How can you talk in such a way, Barbara Caroli ! Stealing, indeed ; and it is *I* who tell you to do it ! Why, is it not yours, I should like to know ? Whose should it be ? Stealing, indeed !”

“ Well but, Signora Sibilla, if you think I ought to take it—and for certain you ought to know—how can I go to a man I never saw, and say to him, ‘ Please to buy this crucifix.’ He will ask me, of course, who I am, and where I got it ? And then what shall I say ?”

“ Oh, never you mind about that ! I shall give you a letter, and you will hand it to Signor Gralli, and that will explain all about it. There will be no questions asked, except to show him the article I shall tell him of. And then he will tell you what it is worth, and will buy it if he

can. If it is what I think it is, I have no doubt that he will buy it.”

The Signora Caroli was still not quite convinced. There was something that grated unpleasantly against her feelings in thus selling her husband's hoarded treasure the instant the breath was out of his body. The fact was, too, that the proposed transaction did really come somewhat nearer to stealing than either of the women imagined. Legally the widow had no right to make away with any of the property of her husband, without the consent and co-operation of her son. But neither of the women were lawyers enough to know this. However the crucifix was carefully and reverently replaced on its hook in the wall, and the widow said she would think about the advice that had been given her.

She did think, and the more she thought the more irresistible was the temptation of getting money enough for such a venture in the lottery, on the three supernaturally indicated numbers, as would beyond all possibility of doubt bring a

prize which would suffice to smooth the way for Carlo's marriage, and make her comfortable. There was also much more talk between the two women—incessant talk, indeed, at every moment they could find unencumbered by the presence of Carlo.

And the result was that it was finally determined that the Signora Caroli should start for Florence on the Friday morning. She would arrive there abundantly early enough to get her business transacted, so as to have plenty of time for the purchase of a ticket that night, if all went well according to their hopes.

This, then, was the purpose of the Signora Caroli's sudden and half secret journey to Florence—half secret inasmuch as she had uttered no word to her son of her intention.

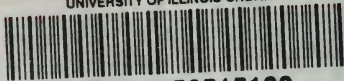
She started on her walk down the hill with the precious crucifix neatly packed in a napkin in such a manner as to carefully conceal the shape and nature of the contents of the parcel, with a letter from the Signora Sibilla to her

brother Stefano Gralli, on the Ponte Vecchio, and with a paper in her bosom on which the three fortunate numbers were written, in case the deeply-engraved copy of them inside her bosom should not prove sufficient to ensure the remembrance of them.

END OF VOL. I.



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