

An ornate, gold-tooled decorative border surrounds the text. It features intricate scrollwork and floral motifs at the top and bottom, with a central diamond-shaped ornament.

LOUIS
NORBERT

BY
VERNON LEE

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TO
ELISABETHA, LUCRESIA,
AND
FILIPPO CORSINI,
FROM THEIR GRATEFUL GUEST
VERNON LEE

Christmas, 1913

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

PERSONAGES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

LADY VENETIA HAMMOND, a delightful siren of uncertain age.

EARL OF ARTHINGTON (*her brother*), personage who does not speak.

THE OLD MARCHESE AT PISA.

THE MARCHESE'S DAUGHTER.

THE YOUNG ARCHÆOLOGIST.

Scene : PISA AND ARTHINGTON MANOR, 1908-9.

PERSONAGES OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

LOUIS NORBERT DE CARITAN.

SIR ANTHONY THESIGER, ancestor of Lady Venetia.

A YOUNG LORD, personage who does not speak.

MARIA MANCINI (*niece of Mazarin*), widow of Prince Colonna, Great Constable of Naples.

A WOMAN disguised as a singing man.

A MASKED LADY.

"QUEEN BERENICE."

THE ABBÉ MANFREDINI, a man of learning and parts, spy and assassin in the pay of the French Court.

ARTEMISIA, a crowned poetess, afterwards abbess.

AN OLD SPANISH CAPTAIN (*father to Artemisia*).

MASKERS, SPIES, BRAVOES, AND TRAVELLERS.

THE SCENE IS IN ROME AND PISA, 1683-1684.

LOUIS NORBERT

PROLOGUE

CHAPTER I

“GOOD heavens—why, this is *he*,” exclaimed Lady Venetia, suddenly coming to a stop before a sepulchral slab in the easternmost corner of the Campo Santo of Pisa.

The young Archæologist, thus interrupted just as his companion had seemed so enchantingly interested in all he was showing her, recognised, with a little chill, that the delightful morning was over. With the resigned disinterestedness of disappointment, his eyes followed the lady's, now fixed on a marble tablet, small, unornamented and (he added to himself with vindictive criticalness) remarkably poorly lettered for its date, which was the end of the seventeenth century. It was let

into the wall, breast-high, between two of those gothic windows of the famous cloister.

“ Louis Norbert de Caritan ”—the Archæologist read out loud, in a voice expressive of utter blankness of mind, shadowed over by personal disconsolateness, and added, for politeness’ sake—“ Who was he ? ”

Lady Venetia at first took no notice of the question and still less of the tone. Her very beautiful eyes (which had a delightful way of filling with tears whenever she was much amused) were fixed on that slab, as if she were looking through it and its wall to some distance beyond ; and despite the conventional self-control she always attempted to cultivate, it was perfectly obvious that she was moved far beyond surprise or curiosity.

“ Who he was ? ” she answered after a silence, as if the Archæologist’s uninterested question had slowly worked into her own previous thoughts.

“ Who Louis Norbert de Caritan was ? Well, that is exactly what we none of us in my family have ever known and probably ever will know.”

Then, with an effort of politeness betokening that it was no business of her companion's, she vouchsafed some further information.

"This is the name: Louis Norbert de Caritan, and very nearly the same date—1682 instead of 1684—on a portrait hanging in my old home in what used to be called the Ghost's room."

"How very interesting," answered the Archæologist perfunctorily. He had a notion that great ladies were all addicted to some form or other of spirit-rapping. Besides, the pleasant talk they had been having was at an end, all along of this silly mystery; and she would no longer care a button about the Life of Saint Ranieri or any of the paintings he had carefully selected to expound to her.

"It isn't a bit interesting except to me," answered Lady Venetia, with icy irritation.

The tone smote him. What unpardonable solecism was he being snubbed for by this woman, whose beauty, whose manner, whose very age (quite unfathomably mysterious in his youthful eyes), were already fascinating him hopelessly with mingled delight and

terror? That—namely his own unknown offence—was the only riddle he could think of as he stood silently by her side, where she stooped her majestic person (being an Archæologist he thought of her as Demeter, also because she was reddish blonde) over that tablet, reiterating the words of the epitaph as if learning them by heart, and attempting to pronounce the old-fashioned spelling.

“To think of his having died here at Pisa, *our* young Frenchman, Louis Norbert; and none of us having known anything about it. *Louis Norbert de Caritan, sixteen hundred and eighty-four, and son of Pierre Norbert sieur de Caritan and Claude de Leyrac his wife of La Rochelle*—just as on our own picture—of course it’s he. And only twenty-four years old.”

Lady Venetia spoke as if to herself. She had forgotten not only the Archæologist who was so kindly giving up his time to showing her the sights of Pisa, but the rest of her party, who must by this time be at the other end of the cloister. Indeed, the Archæologist began wondering whether his scientific dignity did not require him to set off after the others and

leave this contemptuous and disconcerting siren to the contemplation of her certainly foolish and probably quite unauthentic mystery—in fact, assert himself in some manner he could not decide upon. But after a minute more of such silent contemplation of the epitaph, varied by raising her eyes to a ball of cloud dazzlingly white on the blue between the window tracery and the black tip of one of the cypresses of the enclosure, Lady Venetia suddenly turned to him and asked for a pencil. “I must get this inscription correct,” she explained.

“Allow me to copy it for you,” cried the Archæologist, suddenly reconciled and joyful.

“All right—then I’ll dictate it to you.” But with one of her delightful, unaccountable changes of manner (delightful at least when they were changes back to one’s own poor self) she became suddenly very aware of the Archæologist, and more particularly of his having pulled out his notebook.

“Oh no, not in that,” she exclaimed. “I can’t have you tearing out leaves from your notes about the Origin of Pisan Architecture

and all those wonderful things you have been so awfully good telling me about—no, not your notes. Haven't you a card, or the entrance ticket—anything to scribble upon? ”

The Archæologist, who had retained certain foreign habits despite his English bringing up, bowed very ceremoniously and made a little speech.

“ I will copy out the epitaph for you as soon as I get home, and it shall remain, if you will allow it, among my pedantic dates and measurements, in remembrance of a very delightful interlude in the routine of my work.”

“ Thank you, you really *are* very nice,” Lady Venetia exclaimed, unconsciously implying that she had just been thinking that he was not. So she fell to reading out loud, with minute, she evidently thought scientific, insistence on the old-fashioned and moreover faulty spelling of that French inscription engraved by seventeenth-century Italian stone masons. It was, or rather is—for you can go and read it to-morrow—as follows :

“ Ci-git Louis Norbert de Caritan, escuier, fils de Pierre Norbert sieur de Caritan pres de

la Rochelle et de Claude de Leyrac sa femme, décédés. Lequel Lovis, avant de passer au service de S. M. le Roy d'Angleterre voulust fair (sic) ce voyage d'Italie et estant tombé malade a Rome pour changer d'air se porta en cette ville de Pise où subitement il mourust et fust enterré en ce saint lieu le XV jour d'Aoust MDLXXXIV asgée (sic) de XXIV ans. Priez Dieu pour le salut de son ame. Fait par le très cher ami de la nation et maison de France, l'Abbé Manfredini, chanoine de cette cathedrale."

"Curious all this talk about this Abbé Manfredini," remarked the Archæologist, professional instinct overcoming fear of intrusion on Lady Venetia's mystery. "I mean all this talk of his being le Très Cher Ami de la Nation et Maison de France, on the tombstone of another man, about whom he says so little, and who was going to enter the English King's service, not the French one's. Do you remark that he never says he was the friend of the deceased or of the deceased's family?"

"How could he?" interrupted Lady

Venetia ; “ nobody ever knew what Louis Norbert’s family was, and we have always known that Pierre, his father, and Claude, his mother, must have been faked by my great-great-great-grand—whatever you would call him—Nicholas Thesiger, who brought him up.”

The Archæologist was too shy to express any surprise at this additional information, which Lady Venetia gave as if she were mentioning some well-known recent detail of her own family affairs.

“ All the more,” he said, glad to get over that—“ all the more it seems odd that this Abbé Manfredini should have thought it necessary to assure the public that he himself was a friend of the French Crown, a circumstance which didn’t concern the deceased. It almost looks as if Manfredini may have been one of the unofficial diplomatic agents that Kings and Ministers employed in those days, especially in Italy, wandering abbés, monks, barber surgeons, even opera singers, people who were paid for secret information and occasionally for something worse.”

Lady Venetia’s eyes had settled on the

Archæologist's face as he spoke the last words. "That explains," she burst out when he had barely done. "That explains everything! I mean Louis Norbert's death here and our never having heard of it. It was this Abbé Manfredini who did it. I have always felt sure there must have been foul play. And it was by order of the French Court. They had some secret reason against him. And of course they couldn't kill him while he was living with my people in England; so they waited till he happened to go to Italy. And then that Abbé put up the tombstone with all this talk about his friendship to the French nation and crown. It was his way of sending in his bill after he had done the murdering. Do you see?"

In saying these words Lady Venetia turned upon the Archæologist a face so beautifully and wonderfully inspired as to deprive him of every reasonable reply. But instead of yielding to his sense of awe and admiration by holding his tongue, the ill-advised youth tried to show himself a perfect man of the world.

"What I see," he answered with heavy

airiness, "is that your imagination not only gallops but flies." And by way of making matters worse, he even added: "Why, it is you, not I, who ought to have been an archæologist."

"I could not possibly have disliked anything more," was her reply. Then, drawing herself together, till she loomed goddess-like, and casting an indifferent glance at the neighbouring frescoes—"By the way," she added, "the rest of them must be getting impatient for lunch."

Whereupon she walked silently towards the exit.

But, despite the woman of the world's dignity (mysteriously terrifying and fascinating to the Archæologist) Lady Venetia was in reality remarkably impulsive. So, by the time they had got to the gate of the cloister, she was already remorseful at having shown so much exasperation with this exasperating young pedant, just as she had previously been self-reproachful for taking him so much into her confidence.

"You will come home and have lunch with

us, of course, Professor ? ” she said, using that title to which he had no sort of right, and avoiding looking at him.

But the Archæologist had understood. Or at all events he had smarted. So he pretended that he had an archæological meeting which would spread over all that day. It would also, he suddenly remembered, prevent his having the honour of dining with Lady Venetia and her friends. He felt of ice and also of steel, let alone tingling (which neither of these calm substances would do) with self-defensive indignation. But when he had accompanied Lady Venetia to the steps of the Campo Santo and helped her into one of the cabs which were prowling round in the wintry sunshine, something seemed suddenly to give way inside him, the steel and the ice turned into an aching void. And, at the very moment that the lady drove off to overtake her party, he suddenly exclaimed :

“ Oh, I had forgotten the inscription. I will copy it out and bring it this evening, if you will allow me to call for a few minutes after dinner to take leave of you——”

CHAPTER II

WHEN the Archæologist turned up at the hotel that evening, with a facsimile of the epitaph, whose artistic elaboration must have taken much of the time of the supposed archæological meeting, he found Lady Venetia and her companions on that belated motoring tour wrapped up in furs and bent upon a walk in the moonlight. Of course they all said the Professor (for so they called him in their innocence of what professorship means) must show them their way. And of course, despite his resolutions, the "Professor" did so with alacrity.

They left the semicircle of white lights of the Arno quays, with tall white houses asleep above the wavering reflections in the river. They walked silently through the hushed emptiness of the wide Pisan streets, and

naturally in the direction of the cathedral and Campo Santo. The moon was full and high ; and the church and tower and baptistery stood clear as at noon, every tiny pillar and moulding drawn as in Indian ink, the pale yellow of their marble nowise bleached by that pure white radiance. Only, under the blue, luminous sky (where a single star pierced throbbing and a cirrus spread across like an ostrich feather) all things had a stillness, a solemnity and aloofness far beyond that of day, even in this solitary and venerable corner.

They walked—*they* were the Archæologist, Lady Venetia, her cousin the ambassador on leave of absence and his two uninteresting daughters—round and round and up and down for quite a long while, silent, and aware of the silence only the more when one of them made a remark in an undertone. The windless night was icy. But it was not merely the moon and the biting cold which made the diplomatic personage, walking ahead with his two girls, turn round comparing the wide, shining cathedral platform with the terrace in Hamlet. The long wall of the Campo

Santo, with its flat buttresses, was in full moonlight, and the side of the cathedral nearest it was in its own shadow, lying deep, broad, and black upon the grass. But as they paced this shadowy side, there met them as they came forward (seeming to steal round till it stood fully revealed) the great circular whiteness of the baptistery, with the moonlight searching all its openwork, and the buttons along its cupola-ribs black against the bright and moon-blue sky. On the other side stretched the long, low belfried wall of the old hospital, and the stone posts closing the grassy precincts glared white. And among the crenellated walls on the other hand there loomed half visible that deep, closed gate, unopened doubtless for centuries, with the archaic lion among the bushes on its battlements: that gate which always made the young Archæologist, who, after all, was secretly a poet, think most unscientifically of the East, of Saladin and Cœur de Lion, and at the same time, more unscientifically still, of primæval Greece, Mycenæ or Argos.

That familiar haunting thought freed him

from whatever self-conscious shyness the solemn moonlight had not blotted out already. And, with the eloquence of those shy people who can talk easily only on deep or poetic subjects, he described this impression to Lady Venetia.

“Then you are not a pedant and afraid of seeming one,” she remarked with meditative frankness.

“You thought me a pedant—and I *did* feel afraid of seeming one,” he answered quite honestly, “because I didn’t know what manner to put on, and put on the wrong one, of course—this morning when you began talking about that . . . and his epitaph.”

Somehow he was afraid of saying the name.

“Exactly. You did not know what to make of my romancing, as you thought it. You were wondering whether I was an amateur novelist or a planchette and crystal reader. And in the doubt you thought it extremely proper that I should be snubbed by a scientific mind.”

It was so absurdly like the truth and at the

same time so far from what he felt it to have been, that the Archæologist, having become quite natural, began to laugh.

Lady Venetia laughed also, and there was something enchanting in her laugh, first because it was often accompanied by tears, and secondly because it was nearly always more at her own expense than at others.

“There is nothing to laugh about,” she protested in the midst of her laughter—“it was very, very painful. And I have never regretted anything so much in my life as having let myself talk about Louis Norbert de Caritan to a pedant I had mistaken for a sympathetic friend.”

“It wasn’t the poor pedant’s fault though, was it, dear Lady Venetia? Heaven knows he was innocent of any attempt to be sympathetic, worse luck to him.”

“People don’t seem sympathetic because they try to,” she answered. “You ought to know that, even at your youthful age. You had been awfully nice and kind to all of us; not minding our being dunces, and having faith in our being able to see beautiful things

if somebody else was kind enough to open our eyes to them. And you had said nice things, without knowing it, about yourself. Just hinting at them in your matter-of-fact way. That Abbess, who had been a fashionable poetess and musician, that you showed us the portrait of yesterday, and whom you seemed to be rather in love with ; by the way, you never told me her name ? ”

“ She was of Spanish extraction, or rather of Moorish, de Valor y Cordoba—her name was Artemisia.”

Lady Venetia looked up in the moonlight. “ Really ? ” she remarked. “ Artemisia is a name that exists in my family.”

“ It is a name one meets with in Italy in the seventeenth century, when she lived,” he answered, little guessing that she had been on the point of adding “ and it is one of my own names.”

“ The seventeenth century she lived in ? ” resumed Lady Venetia. “ Louis Norbert de Caritan also lived in the seventeenth century, and died in Pisa. Perhaps they may have met ? ”

“Just as likely not,” replied the Archæologist, with historical dryness. It was like looking the other way. And he felt obliged to look the other way. For as they loitered on far behind their companions, and she walked by his side tall and vague in her furs, he somehow knew that her fine, kind face, more beautiful and bewitching than when she had been young, was tilted upwards in that characteristic manner, gazing up as if the moonlight was full of unseen things. And, just because he knew what her face looked like at that moment, he naturally could not look at it.

“You see,” suddenly resumed Lady Venetia, “you had happened to surprise, by the chance of our finding the epitaph, one of the few bits of childish romance that exist, that I cherish secretly in my remarkably prosaic, elderly heart. . . . Sixteen hundred and eighty-four—that is the date, isn’t it?”

“And the fifteenth of August,” chimed in the Archæologist, with an extra dose of scientific dryness.

With that easy cordiality which already

made him occasionally jealous of all the other people to whom she must evidently show it, the lady had passed her long-furred sleeve through his arm, and he felt the weight of her slow, graceful, rather heavy step as she walked.

“The portrait of him hangs,” she went on after a long silence, “or rather it used to hang—for heaven knows all the changes my late sister-in-law may have made!—in what was called the Ghost’s room at Arthington. No one had ever seen or heard a ghost in that particular room, so far as I know; and there are ghosts enough to be seen and heard (I don’t care for ghosts, do you? such prosaic twaddle it seems to me!) in other parts of the old place. But that room has always been called the Ghost’s room, and has always been shut up, except when there were hunt balls and that sort of thing and people had to be crammed everywhere; Arthington is ten times too big for us nowadays! Well, about the Ghost’s room. We children were afraid of it, at least the others were afraid and didn’t like being in it. *I* was afraid and *did* like

being in it perhaps all the more. It's not at all in the oldest part of the house, but in the wing added early in the Restoration by Anthony Thesiger, the one who helped to turn out James II. and who was made the first Lord Arthington (we have always been Whigs—Cromwellians first—and as to me of course I'm a Socialist). There are no mullions, or low ceilings. I suppose you'd call it imitation Italian; I often think of that part of the place in certain villas here in Italy. The room has a bed with faded sort of tulip stripes, red and yellow, on the curtains and coverlet, and a canopy with four of those cut velvet plumes or vases we saw in your friend's palace the day before yesterday. And there is an ebony inlaid cabinet, with mirrors inside when you open it; and the walls are hung with all manner of black blurred pictures: boar hunts, and smoky battles and flower-pieces like faded chintz; you have seen the sort of thing ten thousand times in Italy; I suppose it's all the refuse of what generations of Thesigers carted home from the Grand Tour. The portrait of Louis Norbert is the

only one in the room. It's rather black too, but in a different way : he has black clothes which you can't see quite plainly, and long black hair ; and his face and hands and collar stand out from all that black. I don't know whether the picture is any good as a picture. I haven't seen it since I got married, and that's more than twenty years ago. But I see it quite clearly in my mind ; I mean I see *him*, for it never struck me to think of him as a portrait !

“ It all began by my eldest brother one day locking me into the Ghost's room for a lark. He thought I should be frightened—I was quite a small girl—and so I was at first, because I'd never been in the Ghost's room, except when the housekeeper showed people round. Of course I wouldn't scream or howl, or bang at the door, or do any of the things my brother and the other boys expected a girl to do. I remember sitting for a long time half paralysed with terror and not daring to lift my eyes. The shutters were closed and a ray of light came between them, making the dark things on the wall and that dreadful bed

with the hearse-plumes just barely visible ; and the light ended off in a horrid white spot in a looking glass. I steeled myself to look round ; then I felt ashamed and slowly crawled (feeling the whole time as if someone or some dreadful piece of furniture would claw me) to the window, and got on to a chair and contrived to unbolt the shutters. There were big trees close in front and it was getting on for evening, so that the light wasn't much use, if anything making all those black things on the wall and the bed and that dreadful mirror only more alarming. But in the light I first became aware of *him*—I mean of Louis Norbert. I ought by rights to have been only more frightened when I turned round and found his white face confronting me ; and I daresay I *did* think he was the room's ghost. But somehow I stopped being frightened as soon as I saw him. He was so awfully kind and sad, as if he wanted to help me, and at the same time (and that was more to the point) he wanted *me* to help *him*. I dragged a chair up, and stood on it and looked at him and spelt out his name :

Louis Norbert de Caritan. And I remained sitting there, and dozed off and dreamed all sorts of lovely things ; I'm not sure he didn't want to marry me at the end, anyhow I remember I helped him in some mysterious way. When my brother, who had forgotten me, unlocked the door, late in the evening, he was horribly frightened by finding me quite numb and cold in that arm-chair ; and I had to be put to bed, and the nurse made sure I should have brain fever, just to punish poor Arthington. Gracious, when I think what he's turned into now, sitting boxed up in two rooms, poor dear, thinking only of draughts ! Well—after that I used to steal back to the Ghost's room and spend a good deal of my time there. Of course no one guessed I should choose it for my *secret place*, after it had given me a fright and made me half ill. And if the housekeeper ever missed the key, she certainly never suspected *me* of abstracting it ; but we were a happy-go-lucky set, and most often she had the key all right, but the door wasn't locked.

“So, for years, I lived all my *secret time*—for

every child who isn't an only child must have secret times and secret places unless they're mere driven cattle—in the presence of Louis Norbert. At first it may have been a matter of convenience, just as I had previously spent my secret time, carried the books I wanted to read alone and my especial doll and pet stones and general fetishes, under a bridge on a dried-up stream in the park. Then, as I grew older, it began to be distinctly for the sake of Louis Norbert. Of course I'd always been fond of him ever since that first time, and grateful, and I liked to tell him stories and invent them about him. But later I became acutely aware of his being there, and no longer felt so much at my ease, and no longer brought anything except books of poetry—which I didn't read, but thought fine—or very romantic novels—I remember Mrs. Henry Wood's—it does seem funny! It was the time when I discarded dolls and took to practising the piano furiously. I began to stay less at a time in the Ghost's room, but to go there in a funny, formal way, always with my hair tidy and my dress fairly straight.

Once I even put on my best hat and a pair of my mother's long gloves. It was something like going to church (*not* of course the church one really did go to) and also like being in love. And in fact when I *was* in love I forgot all about the Ghost's room. But— isn't it odd? I spent one of my last hours in my old home in that room, the day before I was married. I suddenly felt awfully unhappy—women sometimes do when about to be married—and all alone in the world. And I took a very absurd leave of Louis Norbert, standing on a chair, the same arm-chair my brother had found me asleep in when I was small. Since then I've not seen him, though I have been time after time at Arthington ; he had dropped out of my life . . . I don't know"—suddenly concluded Lady Venetia, addressing the Archæologist and no longer, so to speak, her own self—" I don't know why I tell you all this nonsense. I suppose that when one's old enough to be a grandmother one begins to harp upon one's childhood ; it's a beginning of senility. And then—have you never remarked it? (but perhaps you are still too young)—

there are things one can talk about to strangers just because they *are* strangers. Why, where are the others gone? ”

And Lady Venetia, disengaging her arm from the Archæologist's, looked up and down in that empty, icy moonlight, whence those great marble things shone disembodied in their pallor.

“ They must have lost patience and gone back to the hotel,” she added. “ Which is the way? Good gracious, I fear I've kept you here till midnight with my silly stories, and that you must be half dead of cold. Let's walk a little briskly, if you don't mind.”

“ I was afraid—I felt sure,” murmured the Archæologist half to himself, “ that you would suddenly feel chilly after so long a time in the moonlight.”

“ Chilly and grown old, as Browning says,” answered the lady.

CHAPTER III

THEY talked only of indifferent things as they walked quickly towards the riverside: of the probabilities of finishing that motoring tour or whether it would not be necessary to ship the car by rail to Rome; did the "Professor" think the roads would be impassable after this early frost? Was there any likelihood of a north wind to dry them? Also about the Archæologist's work on the Byzantine Origins of Pisan Architecture; would it keep him there long? About the difference between foreign and English Universities. Had he liked his three—or was it six?—years at Oxford? (He had been a Rhodes scholar, hadn't he?) But of course he couldn't have seen it with a really foreign eye, since his mother was English.

"If you weren't so ceremonious," said Lady

Venetia, " I shouldn't have known you from an Englishman. No accent at all."

" You mean that I don't eat with my knife," he answered grimly.

Lady Venetia's excessively sympathetic heart smote her. Was it possible that she could have sounded patronising? She was always rushing into extremes with strangers, being too familiar and then freezing up and hurting their feelings.

It was dreadful! A happy thought struck her.

" Look!" she exclaimed, ignoring the Archæologist's last remark, " isn't this exactly the square with the Commander's statue? And that house, can't you imagine Donna Anna rushing out of it after Don Giovanni?"

They were crossing a small square, bluey-white in the moonlight, and Lady Venetia pointed across its smooth wide flags to a close-shuttered house, whose escutcheon and curved double flight of stairs were carved out in black shadows under the overhanging eaves.

“ Do you not think,” answered the Archæologist, “ that in this house and in this square Louis Norbert de Caritan may have lived and died in August 1684 ? ”

“ I may have given you a right to laugh at me, but you are a prig, after all, to do it.”

But as she turned her indignant eyes on her companion she was surprised to find that he was perfectly serious and deeply moved.

“ I didn't mean it literally, you know,” she murmured.

“ And I did,” he answered curtly ; and they proceeded in silence.

But when they had warmed themselves by the fire of olive logs in the hotel sitting-room, and answered the remarks and questions of the rest of the party whom they found sitting round it, Lady Venetia opened the yellow hotel piano, and having drawn from its chattering strings the great opening chords of the Overture of *Don Giovanni*, she broke suddenly into the music of the Duel, the rushing and lunging little scale passages, the death wail of the Commander and the lamentation of his daughter.

“ I suppose I’m dreadfully old-fashioned,” she said, “ and of course I don’t deny that Strauss would have made one’s flesh creep and given one bad dreams for six weeks with such a subject ; but this music is my idea of romance ; you know what I mean ? The sort of thing that square with the statue in the moonlight means, and then that phrase of Ottavio’s immediately afterwards, trying to console Anna ; one connects it—well, not with the horrid sort of thing people call tragedy—but with all sorts of things sad and mysterious and yet very consoling in a way, death and misfortune, but which didn’t make people horrid. I daresay,” she wound up with a radiant smile to the whole party, as she pushed in the desk and pressed down the lid, “ I daresay I’m talking awful rubbish ! ”

But when the Archæologist rose to take his leave and wish them a good journey—

“ Don’t forget us,” she said, stretching out her hand ; “ and ”—holding his for an imperceptible instant in hers—“ don’t forget Louis Norbert de Caritan, in case you can find out anything about him here at Pisa.”

“I promise to find out something about Louis Norbert de Caritan,” answered the Archæologist, “since you will allow me to take an interest in him,” and he kissed Lady Venetia’s hand in the foreign fashion, and bade them all “good-bye.”

LETTER I

*From the Archæologist to the Lady Venetia
Hammond*

Pisa, December 6, 1908

DEAR LADY VENETIA,

In obedience to your desire, I went to the town archives the day following your departure, but learned, to my great disappointment, that the seventeenth century records (I had intended looking more particularly through the police reports as well as those of the Misericordia and other funeral confraternities) are at this moment in process of removal to a new wing, and consequently inaccessible for the next weeks to all students, even privileged ones like your humble servant.

I have therefore been unable to obtain any information about the stay in Pisa and the death there of the personage in whom you

take an interest. But curious coincidence has given me, so to speak, a glimpse of that Abbé Manfredini who put up the epitaph in the Campo Santo, and whom, through some sympathetic clairvoyance, you judged in an unfavourable light, but one which, as you will see, seems in a certain way justified. (By way of parenthesis: if there were no odd coincidences there would be no archæology, no archæologists, and perhaps no human beings at all.)

This information was obtained in consequence of a perfectly idle interest in a certain palace, which you may remember pointing out to me (saying it made you think of the Duel in *Don Giovanni*, do you remember?) on the evening when I had, for the last time, the honour of escorting you to your hotel. It may amuse you to hear how it all came about.

Having heard, the morning of your departure, that you had decided not to continue the journey in your motor, but to take the Roman express, I hastened to the station in case I might be of any service to you

and your cousins—perhaps, I thought, in sending off the car. But I was a little late, and though the Roman train had not yet left, there was, alas ! (really that Pisa station is the most disgracefully mismanaged, as well as one of the most antipathetic and gloomy of stations) another interminable train blocking the platform, so that, by the time I could run round to the further line, *your* train had just begun moving away, to my infinite regret.

I was on the point of leaving that place of disappointment (for I had hoped you might have remembered some commission or some other enquiry to entrust me with)—well, I was about to leave, feeling also rather ridiculous by reason of the bunches of violets in my hands, when I was stopped by old Marchese Viscardi, whose palace I had had the honour of showing you, and whose acquaintance I shall always regret that you did not make, for he is the most exquisite and, alas ! the last example of one of the most characteristic and enchanting of Italian types : the provincial nobleman who is at once a farmer, a sportsman, a scholar, and a man of great

artistic taste. And, what happened to be even more to my purpose, a passionate antiquarian who seems to have inherited from his many illustrious ancestors every minutest historical tradition of his native town. He had just come from boar-hunting in the Maremma ; his clothes seemed still to carry the smell (perhaps it was only my fancy) of the thickets of myrtle and lentisk in which he had been reducing them to raggedness. He was going to see his grandchildren near Lucca and consequently to have his midday meal at the station while waiting for a train, instead of going to his house. I adore this old man, not only for his learning and kindness, but also for his look of stepping out of a Van Dyke picture. So I asked leave to join in his very frugal repast. When he had told me all about the boars that had been shot (the mere names of those woodland hills with their views of Etruscan capes and islands are like music to me) and also the measurements of a certain church-cornice I had once admired in his company, I watched for my opportunity.

“ You who know every stone in Pisa by

heart, Marchese," I said, "will, of course, know all about a slab in the easternmost wall of the Campo Santo, to the memory of a young Frenchman who died in Pisa late in the seventeenth century."

"Louis de Caritan—let me see, there's another name too (I have entirely lost my memory with advancing years!)—yes! Louis Norbert de Caritan—of course! Not *quite* the easternmost as you say, but rather, I venture to correct, *north-eastern* by north, since it is near the figures treading the grapes and about twenty metres from the famous sarcophagus with the Amazons. Yes, Louis Norbert de Caritan, *escuier*, fils de Pierre," etc.—and the marvellous old gentleman repeated the whole inscription with scarcely any hesitation and only one mistake.

I had to make an effort not to interrupt him, I can assure you.

"Then, Marchese," I exclaimed, before the last words were fairly out of his mouth, "then you will be able to tell me all about this Frenchman." But with a courteous regret (and yet he couldn't have guessed my dis-

appointment !) the Marchese answered that he knew nothing about the personage I alluded to.

“ You see,” he added, “ I am not a real *savant* like you ; my scanty knowledge of local history is confined, I am ashamed to say, to my own family records, and so I am ignorant (I often feel it with shame) about the many interesting foreigners (your poet Shelley, I believe, among others) who used to come to Pisa for their health and of whom several died here ; you remember in the Campo Santo the monument to Count Zamoyski, and another to Prince Ratibor and——”

“ Yes, yes, but that doesn't bear on my point.” I had scarcely said it before I felt horribly shocked at my rudeness, particularly when the adorable old gentleman merely answered with courteous dignity :

“ I regret my ignorance particularly when, as in your case, it prevents my satisfying the curiosity of my learned friends.”

What a brute my disappointment had made me ! So, wishing to atone a little by giving his knowledge an opportunity of displaying itself, I bethought me of that house which had

struck your fancy during our walk in the moonlight, and I asked him what he knew about it.

He knew half an hour's worth of detail : who had built that house, who had built every preceding house on the same site, ever since Pisa had existed, the alterations from the original plan, the number of the windows, the thickness of the walls, the orders of the architecture, let alone all the people who had ever leased any part of it. He was forgetting his train.

“ For an archæologist like you,” he at last said, “ the house in question has moreover another interest, as having once contained (and more precisely, between 1679 and 1693) one of the most celebrated private collections of antique gems existing at that epoch, that of a certain Abbate Manfredini, sometime canon of the cathedral.”

“ The Abbé Manfredini ! ” I exclaimed, “ indeed ! Why, of course I have heard of him.” I didn't mention where or in what connection, for fear of returning to the sore subject of his ignorance about the epitaph. “ Do tell me about him.”

My request was unnecessary.

“ His collection,” went on the Marchese, “ contained, as you doubtless know, some of the finest antiques now existing in foreign museums, for instance, a sardonyx by Pasiteles which is one of the glories of the cabinet of gems of St. Petersburg ; and a celebrated hunt of the Caledonian boar (that has remained in my poor memory because of our own boar-hunts, in which I trust you will again partake)—a Caledonian Hunt, I was saying, supposed to be after a fresco by Polygnotus. Besides this collection of gems Canon Manfredini possessed also a torso of a faun which was bought by the Elector of Saxony on the disposal of his property in consequence of the painful conclusion of his career.”

“ What painful conclusion to his career ? ” I asked, trying not to be too much interested (*that* the Marchese had dated as 1693 and the epitaph was of 1684—no, there could be no connection !).

“ The Abbate Manfredini,” resumed the Marchese, “ was a man of very great parts

and most cultivated taste, thanks to both of which he had risen to a condition much above his birth, for he is said to have been the son of Prince Ludovisi's cook. He was a very fine Latinist, even in a time when Latinists were more plentiful than they are, alas! nowadays. Some of his odes (one, I remember, is on the raising to the purple of my great-great-grand-uncle Cardinal Spini) have been printed in Bachofen's *Florilegium*; and some of his epigrams have recently been re-edited to celebrate the marriage of my cousin Lanfreducci. He was also well versed in natural science and made some interesting discoveries in chemistry, as I am assured by my old friend Professor Bimboni, for I have no competence in such things, unfortunately. He was one of the many persons of that time (you will remember the notorious Cavalier Borri) who dabbled in the transmutation of metals; unfortunately also, so at least it was asserted, his studies extended to the preparation of poisons; those were the days, as you remember, of so-called *Acqua Tofana* and the *Poudre de Succession* of Brinvilliers

and Exili. Be this as it may, he fell into ill repute with the Grand Ducal Government, and more particularly awakened suspicion under Pope Innocent XII., and was confined, on a charge of atheism, in the castle of St. Leo in Romagna, where he died in the pontificate of Clement XI., to whose family my grandmother, I am proud to say, belonged. But I am forgetting my train in the pleasure of conversing with you—and my little grand-daughters had promised to meet me with the carriage.”

I snatched his bag and guncase and ran with them to the Lucca train, which he was just in time to catch. But as the guard shouted *Partenza* and tootled the horn of this operatic country, the old man leant out of the window and said quickly :

“ As regards that Canon Manfredini, I have found in a letter of Cardinal Azzolino, a relation of my wife’s, and also, as you know, Queen Christina of Sweden’s testamentary executor, a reference to him, to the effect that this Queen always averred that this same Manfredini was a dangerous man who possessed the secret of the so-called Iron Mask and

many others, and would some day have to be suppressed by the Court of France, on whose blackmail he subsisted, eking out what he got by spying for various potentates by turns."

So you see, dear Lady Venetia, that you were quite right in guessing that the Abbé Manfredini was a villain, and thinking of that house in connection with romance and violence (you remember the *Don Giovanni* music?). But *I*, therefore, was right in saying (though you took the remark, if I may speak and live, rather ungraciously) that *you*, rather than *I*, ought to have been an archæologist.

I am, dear Lady Venetia,

Yours, etc.

LETTER II

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington Manor, Burton Saxon,

February 16, 1909

MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

Do not think me ungrateful for your

long and delightful letter. The very circumstances which prevented my answering only made it more welcome, for I read it (two months late !) in the midst of very sad solitude and dreariness, when one was thankful to be reminded that such a thing as romance had ever existed !

But I ought to explain, in case you should not have heard it, that I had scarcely been in Rome three days after we left Pisa (what a time ago it now seems—that wonderful moonlight walk ! and all about Louis Norbert !) before I was sent for to look after my eldest brother (my sister-in-law died about a year ago) who had had a stroke and was despaired of. He is now out of danger, unless another stroke comes, but crippled, and likes me to stay on. But for six weeks the danger was continual. That's why your letter has remained unanswered so long, and now I'm answering it from my old home. Don't think I wasn't grateful for your letter. When Arthington was once out of danger it gave me a lot of pleasure (I couldn't read books, somehow, or newspapers) and something to

think of—I mean all about Louis Norbert. It's odd that it was different while the danger was there. Have you remarked (no, you're too young probably) how one can live one's life in the constant face of death? I suppose one braces oneself and makes the best of all small mercies, and when the danger is over one just plops down. During those weeks—seven, I think—one either sat up all night or went to sleep ready to be called to hear that the worst had come; but it ends by becoming in a dreadful way natural, as if there could be nothing else (men have told me it was like that with soldiers in the trenches or in a besieged town). And the odd thing, and which makes one hot with shame sometimes, is that one isn't miserable the whole time. I hated myself for it, but during that dreadful stress one seemed at times so keenly aware of some things being so good and so interesting, one's breakfast, for instance, after a bad night, or dawn with the bare trees against it as one came downstairs. For a great many days—weeks, in fact—I never dared leave the house for more than half an hour

every day, and then always leaving word where I could be signalled to ; and do you know, in those hurried runs, I seem to have discovered, for the first time in my life, how beautiful this old place is : the red brick (it really is like oranges and geranium) where it has got a little chipped, against the white stone-coping, and the courses of black (you know the sort of thing) gave me a sort of stitch of pleasure. Also there seemed something inexpressibly harmonious and at the same time romantic in the round niches with Roman busts, and in the terraced balustrade, looking down the green walk between the old, old pines, which are almost like cedars. I really seemed never to have seen any of it before.

Now my brother is better, the doctor out of the house, only one nurse remaining (who will, I fear, be permanent). He is beginning to be able to speak again, in a way that wrings one's heart. And he, who used to be the most gruffly unsentimental of men, now likes to look at the trees with me holding his hand, also to listen to music, which he used to hate.

How tragic, tragic the way that illness and old age sometimes make people spiritual, susceptible of things they never felt before. It's as heartrending, don't you think, as the transfiguration of dead people's faces? but I daresay you are too young to have much experience of such matters.

Of course it's *I* who have to make the music, a very little at a time; but when he's a bit stronger I shall send for a nice little hump-backed fiddler who is starving in a slum at present. For poor Arthington likes to look over a lot of old instruments, really almost a collection and some quite good, which have accumulated in the house. They are brought in, spinets and harpsichords and all manner of fiddles, one every day; and he puts a finger on the keys or pulls a string and looks pleased in a way that makes me want to cry.

Well! I have told you all this to explain why your letter remained unopened under a constantly increasing pile, and why, since I *have* been able to read it, it has been a great pleasure and in a way company. I like to think of Louis Norbert, though I haven't had

the energy to go and see his portrait again. I am utterly at a loose end now—I can't read, except the advertisements in the *Times* or a page of poetry now and then (funny, I read the *Penseroso*—fancy, it must have been quite “recent verse” in Louis Norbert's day, or at least like Browning to us). You see, my mind still runs on “our mysterious young Frenchman,” as my father used to call him. So I do want you, as soon as those archives are open again, to go and see whether you can't find out something about him. Or, if you can't find out anything, make it up! After all, aren't you archæologists everlastingly inventing?

I am, dear Professor,

Yours, etc.

PS.—You don't mind my continuing to call you Professor, although you explained you couldn't possibly be one? There's something comfortable in it, better than plain “dear Mister So-and-so.” And then it's nice you should know such a lot and be so young. Why, you could be my grandchild, if I had married *very* early, like people in the Sandwich Islands.

LETTER III

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington : March 1, 1909

MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

I wonder whether you have got a long letter explaining my silence and all that has happened? I sent it to Pisa.

I am now writing to ask you to be very kind and order for me a collection of old Italian music (*not* Parisotti, which I have) you once mentioned at Pisa. I find that the only thing my poor brother (I told you how dreadfully ill he has been) cares for now are the old instruments which have accumulated in this house. He isn't *really* musical, you know, and it bores him hearing the same thing over again often, so we are getting rather to an end of our supply; and as the instruments are principally seventeenth-century harpsichords and

violins and thereabouts, what he likes is hearing the sort of music written for them. It's no good telling him you can play Brahms on a Strad (not that we have a *real* Strad!)—*he* wants nothing later than Corelli. And one must humour him, poor dear.

So be very kind and tell them to send me that collection you mentioned.

Any news of Louis Norbert, I wonder?

Yours, etc.

LETTER IV

From the Archæologist to Lady Venetia

Pisa : March 5, 1909

DEAR LADY VENETIA,

I found both your letters yesterday on return from a walking tour in the Abbruzzi.

You will know, without my fumbling to tell you, how deeply I sympathise in your recent trouble, and how sincerely I hope that Lord

Arthington's recovery may not be liable to the dangers which are still giving you anxiety. I hope you will receive even before this the collection of old Italian music you asked me about. I telegraphed to the publisher at Leipzig to send it you direct.

I am now adding a volume which I picked up last year at a bookstall. As I am not capable of coping with figured basses and all the various old clefs, I had got a friend of mine (the rather odious youth who bored you so about his book on Gluck) to transpose it all into intelligible characters, and this I send you, but also the rather jolly old printed copy of which I beg your acceptance. The youthful music-historian in question condescended to bestow on these compositions the adjective which, I remember, made you so indignant (and really the attitude of us professional critics is insupportable), calling them, as I think he did the baptistery of Pisa, "amusant."

But I want very particularly to know whether *you* like them, because they happen to be by a certain seventeenth-century

Abbess, who in her worldly days was a "tenth Muse and fourth Grace" of Italy (she was even crowned in the Capitol, like Mme. de Staël's Corinne) and in whom I take a faint, romantic interest, as I think I mentioned (but of course you wouldn't remember) when you first did me the honour of telling me about the young Frenchman of the Campo Santo epitaph. The name of the Abbess and crowned poetess-composer (her father was originally a Spaniard) was Artemisia de Valor y Cordoba, called in Italian Artemisia del Valore, which makes rather a pretty name, don't you think, for a heroine and a genius?

So far I have had the pleasure of executing your musical commission. But alas! not the one about Louis Norbert de Caritan, for the archives are still closed to students. But has it not struck you that your own family archives might possibly yield some information about a personage who, after all, seems to have spent the greater part of his life under your roof? Or have you reasons for knowing that such researches have already been made

and have led to nothing? If, as you suggested, he had been murdered in Italy, would his English protectors not have made some enquiry about his untimely end?

Please command me in anything wherein I can hope to serve you, and believe me,

Yours, etc.

PS.—I notice that you say, “if you can find out nothing, couldn’t you make it up?” Ah, dear Lady Venetia, you little know with what a dreadful temptation you are besetting a hitherto innocent student of history!

LETTER V

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington: March 8, 1909

MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

Thanks for the music, which will probably turn up to-morrow. And thank you above all for your friendly interest in my poor

friend Louis Norbert. Your letter has just come, and excited me quite awfully ; as soon as I can get a few hours' freedom I shall make straight for our Muniment Room. Now doesn't it show what silly idiots we frivolous yokels are ! It had *never* struck me that there might be something—must be something—about Louis Norbert among our family papers. Yet of course I knew—I always *have* known that there is a Muniment Room and exactly where—up three steps from the middle landing of the north staircase which creaks so awfully and where Lady Bridget is said to walk (there is a round window which frames the white deer in the park rather nicely). The room has a square door studded with nails like a safe, as if anybody wanted to get in, bless your heart ! and it has a mullioned window over the big cedar. I have only been there once in my life, when some Americans who had been civil to my sister-in-law insisted, after coffee and chartreuse, upon being shown letters of eye-witnesses of the execution of Mary Queen of Scots or some other horrid stuffy Yellow Starch and Star

Chamber sort of tragedy, the worst about which always strikes me (but I have no historical mind !) was the want of air and the people having gone about (at least so their portraits show them) always in furs, even in midsummer landscapes. I have always associated the contents of the Muniment Room with those Americans who said, " My ! ain't it just cunning ! " or words to that effect, and also with some dreadful Psychical Researchers whom Arthington had to show the door because they tried to spirit-rap among our family papers. (I'm sure I would have let them so long as they didn't bore *us* about it all.)

By the way, I have a notion *you took me for a psychical researcher* when I first told you about L. N. that evening in Pisa, and that's what riled me so dreadfully. I can tell you now you've been so kind and we're such good friends. But it never once occurred to me to associate the Muniment Room with dear Louis Norbert. Of course I've always known he was brought up at Arthington ; indeed, it's just all I *do* know about him, and that my father called him " our mysterious young

Frenchman," which always struck me as a bit pompous. But it had never occurred to me to put two and two together. That's what comes of being brought up by the stud groom, as we all were ! I remember you said at Pisa (I thought you so sententious, but how true it was !) that frivolous people (you didn't say "frivolous," because you're too polite, but you implied it)—well, that frivolous people like me divide the world's contents into things they like and things that bore them, and never suspect there may be any other order in the universe.

I fear I can't get a free hour until a cousin comes to relieve guard with my brother early next week, for the poor man hates being left alone. But *then ! then* I will fly up Lady Bridget's Ghost's staircase and revel in the Muniment Room—though I can't help feeling that dear Louis Norbert can't possibly have any connection with all those stuffy horrors, and belongs to a totally different world from the Execution of Mary Queen of Scots and Thomas Thesiger, Knight and Privy Councillor of Queen Elizabeth, who witnessed

it and wears a little fur-lined motoring bonnet and a grey beard and a ruff.

I fear that I have utterly disgraced myself in your wise young historical eyes and that you will cease to take any interest in this foolish, frivolous old woman and her seventeenth-century friends. But the doctor has to-day told me that my brother is at last quite out of danger, and so I am rioting in the mirth of my second childhood.

I am, dear Professor,

Yours nevertheless very truly,

VENETIA HAMMOND.

LETTER VI

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington : April 2, 1909

MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

Do you know they are quite beautiful, those compositions of your seventeenth-

century Abbess? Odd, isn't it, that we should each of us have a friend in the seventeenth century, in the selfsame town too; and that these two friendly ghosts should probably never have met in their mortal life, but only in the idle fancy of us two modern friends!

Thank you awfully for giving me that beautiful volume, "Ricercai et Inventioni—della Nobil donzella Artemisia del Valore—accademica filarmonica et Alfea"—I do love that old book so much, with the fine volutes wasting so much space, and the abbreviations saving so very little. You oughtn't to have given me anything so valuable!

As to the compositions themselves, all of them are interesting and some really *very* fine. Of course I am only a frivolous dunce about music, as everything else, and I have no doubt that odious youth (who was not *amusant* himself, was he?) would say they were nothing but imitation, as was natural with a *femme du monde* (do you remember how he withered all *my* musical likings with that word?). Of course, I am, as I've said, only

a frivolous dunce (which is what he meant) about music, but I *do* know what I like. And I *do* like some of Artemisia's work quite tremendously. By the way, I never told you one of my own names is Artemisia (so much nicer than the silly geographical one I am called by in honour of Venetia Stanley in Charles I.'s time), and perhaps that's one reason why I like her music! But seriously, I am rather less a dunce about music than other things, and at this moment particularly about old Italian music. You see, my poor brother wants to hear things appropriate to his old instruments, so the domestic fiddler and I have been playing a good deal of Corelli and Vivaldi and such like, and I have taken heart of grace and even sung a little to please poor Arthington, things of Carissimi and Scarlatti and Stradella, etc. And I assure you that in this company the Nobil Donzella Artemisia holds her own.

The music of that time has still something a bit awkward in modulation and phrasing (the Italians got, if anything, too glib later); and in the midst of a great deal of learning and

even of pedantry (but then *I* am ashamed to say Bach sometimes bores me to tears with his science!) something pathetically helpless—do you know what I mean? Like babes in the wood who have run away from their lessons, or the look in the eyes of puppies, *dreadfully* sad without knowing why and just because they don't know why; as if, in the midst of all their *inventing* and *ricercare'ing* (I am speaking of seventeenth-century composers and especially Artemisia, not about pups!) and their perpetual helping themselves out with counterpoint, they were trying to catch hold of melodies which they may have heard from the reaped fields as they sat at noon behind closed villa-shutters, or in the moonlight, thrummed along the paved lanes between their garden walls in town.

Good heavens! how eloquent I have become—it comes of consorting with the Ghost of a learned poetess and lady composer! But *you* know what I mean if I seem to talk nonsense, that's what's so comfortable about a learned man. Well! Artemisia has all that, perhaps more, because she was a bit of an

amateur—and it goes to my heart, like certain scents of burning wood that meet one in Italy on fine cold days.

Her poetry, poor dear (for I see the words are also hers where there are any), is rather funny. So crammed with mythology, one never knows who or why or what among all those Almanachs de Gotha of Olympus and all the attributes and *chronique galante* of gods and goddesses. Now *do* explain to me, you who are a learned man, how it came about that the same people, in this case the same woman, should have endured and I suppose liked all that “Smith’s classical dictionary” and all the pedantic, far-fetched conceits about the Spear of Achilles which Heals the Wounds it makes (why on earth did it?) and so forth, and who were able to appreciate and to compose just this sort of music, with its little *bitter* (not sour like Wagner’s) modulations and melancholy dances and its scraps of recitative which are something between a lyric ode and crying passion.

Anyhow, I am tremendously pleased to have Artemisia’s music. And Artemisia is

reconciling me to learning to manage our Dutch harpsichord with stops and pedals and manuals, and a sound something between a crazy old clock and a divine unknown kind of violin.

And so you can imagine us—supposing you have time to imagine us at all!—with the old pines swaying outside the windows, or the pale river fogs creeping along the terraces and round the dripping leaden statues—imagine us in the music-room my poor brother has made himself (and most uncommonly bad it is for sound, with its low stuccoed ceiling and tapestry, but very good for *listening*, one's eye going along those twistings and starrings overhead to where they meet the faint watery green of the windows); my brother (he has become so handsome, diaphanous, and aquiline, poor dear, since his illness) propped in his chair, and the sister of charity (he wouldn't have an ordinary nurse) and the domestic fiddler, who is a pathetic hump-backed person with lovely eyes—and me, seated round the harpsichord and playing those sad, sad ditties which perhaps once sounded gay.

Have you ever thought that people may have actually *danced* to some of those Sarabands of Bach, which seem full of all the resigned mournfulness of man and the dignified indifference of God!

Well—well—I have written you a screed about your Abbess. To-morrow or the day after I shall attack the Muniment Room, and who knows? perhaps write you something about Louis Norbert. How dreadfully exciting!

Yours, etc.

LETTER VII

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington: April 10, 1909

MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

My cousin has not yet come to relieve guard with Arthington, so I have not yet been able to attack the Muniment Room. But I

have not wasted my time, as you shall hear!

Having told my brother about the grave of Louis Norbert, he remembered that there was something about him in the inventory of the Arthington pictures. I got it out at once. It was made in the middle of the eighteenth century by the Reverend Rupert Thesiger "at the desire of his present Lordship." It would amuse your archæologist's mind! Of course we really have one or two fairly good pictures at Arthington and some quite good ones in the London house. But the Rev. Rupert is content with no less than five Raphaels, ten Leonardos, a Michelangelo, and *twelve* Giorgiones ("a rare master," he nevertheless remarks), let alone "some of the greatest masterpieces of the divine *Guido Reni* and the *Carracches*." Well, of course, I didn't read all that at first, but went straight to the portraits, and, sure enough, between the Van Dyke of Sir Nicholas Thesiger, Bart., and Dame Priscilla, his wife, and the Lely of the first Lord Arthington and his two wives, *there* was Louis Norbert.

“310.—Portrait of Louis *Norbert* de Caritan, usually called ‘Sir Nicholas’ young Frenchman’; half length, painter unknown.

“Louis *Norbert* was of noble *Huguenot* family, of *La Rochelle* near *Bourdeaux*; his family having been ruined, and his father and mother having perished in the siege of that place during Cardinal Mazarin’s persecution of the Protestants” (my brother and the *Encyclopædia Britannica* say it was Richelieu who besieged *La Rochelle* and that Mazarin *didn’t* persecute them; is that true?) “the orphan was adopted by Sir Nicholas Thesiger, at one time Ambassador of Oliver Cromwell to Cardinal *Mazarino*, and by him educated along with his son Anthony, afterwards Viscount, then first Earl of, Arthington.

“Louis *Norbert* accompanied his noble friend to the University of *Oxford* and on his travels abroad, and died young and much regretted by the family of his Benefactor and particularly by Dame Priscilla, widow of Sir Nicholas, having distinguished himself by his studious and pious disposition and by his hatred of the *Popish* superstition.”

There ! I read this entry to my brother, and he remarked that the Rev. Rupert was drawing the long bow about La Rochelle and the persecutions, as the siege of that place by Richelieu took place in 1627, so that if L. N.'s parents had perished there he would have been born at least twenty years after their death, since he was twenty-four in 1684. And I am sorry to say that Arthington went so far as to take away the reputation of our austere Cromwellian ancestor by adding that "the fellow" (*i.e.*, Louis Norbert) "was probably some son of the old boy's, the effect of the Paris Embassy on an English Puritan, and that all this romancing about perishing Protestants and La Rochelle was probably invented for Dame Priscilla's benefit, who hadn't got the Encyclopædia Britannica" (not even the old edition which he had let himself be swindled into buying cheap!) "to consult about points of history."

I told Arthington that was just his horrid, modern *club* way of viewing things, and that in L. N.'s time people were far more romantic ; but he only said, "Oh, gammon"—and perhaps he was right.

But to-morrow I really hope to attack the Muniment Room, and then we shall perhaps know everything. Just think how splendid!

What about those old archives at Pisa? Are they *never* going to be opened? Or perhaps you are too busy—how selfish and thoughtless I am!

Yours, etc.

LETTER VIII

(Crossed preceding)

From the Archæologist to Lady Venetia

Pisa : April 12, 1909

DEAR LADY VENETIA,

At last the sixteenth and seventeenth-century town records have become accessible, and I have been able to give myself the very great pleasure of hunting for traces of your mysterious young Frenchman. Alas! without any result. Never once have I come across

any name in the slightest degree like his. But as the police registers were removed to Florence, I will have a look when next I go there ; also there still remain some boxes of unclassified documents among which we may, eventually, find something. I trust you will have better success with your Muniment Room ; my search here is rather of the needle in the haystack kind. Oddly enough, in looking for the key of one mystery, I seem (as often happens with us historians) to have laid my hand on the walled-up door of another one, or rather of *two* apparently different mysteries. Indeed, I am inclined to think (after a week in these Pisa archives) that the whole life of the seventeenth century was honeycombed with mysteries, and that there were as many secret chambers as inhabited ones ! A good third of the papers I have read over appear to be the reports of spies ; and when not salaried official ones (and these of every imaginable sort, physicians, priests, entire orders of monks, astrologers, postillions, actresses, fiddlers, singers, pedlars, poets, and ladies of light conduct)—then amateur spies

in the shape of quiet persons who kept diaries for their own amusement.

Well, to return to the two unexpected mysteries I have hit upon—although to do so is no consolation for the fruitlessness of my researches about your young Frenchman's death—one of them is connected with a lady, apparently a great lady, who seems to have been causing anxiety to the Grand Duke, to the Pope, and to a personage called in some code language "number 109" and also "the Great Sophi of Hyrcania." What this lady was expected to do I cannot for the life of me make out, except that she also seems to have been bent on unravelling mysteries, neither more nor less than you and I, dear Lady Venetia; except that she is usually described as "that madwoman," "that foolish female lunatic who has given Hyrcania and other countries so much worry for so many years"—and "who has got this new suspicion into her crazy brain."

There is no further indication of her status or whereabouts, and she is sometimes called "the mad Berenice"—for everybody in these

letters has at least one code name, and often several. Well, I hope poor Berenice, whoever she was, may have been more successful with *her* mystery, whatever it may have been, than I, alas, have been about Louis Norbert!

The other mystery, which is quite separate, though playing about, so to speak, in the same year, namely, that of Louis Norbert's death, concerns a foreign royalty who haunts Italy, or at least the imagination of Italian princes and spies, about that same year 1684. He is described as a Turk, but, for that reason, is just as likely to have been something else. "The successor of Mahomet of whom you desire news has not yet arrived," writes Father Girolamo Nuti, minor observant, to some personage merely described as "his Excellency."

Then there is a barber, nicknamed *Finocchio* or *Fennel*, who says, "the person of whom you desire news is now in Rome. Be assured we shall keep an eye on him." Another and anonymous informant writes—"the distinguished Mahometan arrived in Pisa two days ago, and is ill of Malaria, doubtless caught in Rome."

I shouldn't bother you with all this odd mysterious gossip of two centuries and a quarter ago, if it were not that your old enemy the Abbé Manfredini—" *très cher ami de la couronne et nation de France* " (rather, as you say, than of poor Louis Norbert)—is mixed up in all this, and evidently held in no higher esteem than by yourself and by old Christina of Sweden, who, perhaps you may remember, told Marchese Viscardi's great-great-grand-uncle that this Manfredini was a spy and a blackmailer, *or worse*. I have found a letter addressed on the back to his Excellency Monsignor Del Nero, Bailiff of the Order of St. Stephen (a Tuscan Military Order), and in it this sentence among a lot of cryptic code phrases: " His Highness also desires that an eye be kept on the usual Abbé (*il solito Abbate*), who, from all we hear, appears to be up to his usual tricks (*fa delle sue*), forgetting that Pisa is not Baalbek (query: Rome ?), and that we will not suffer scoundrels of his kind to have a finger in the affairs of great kingdoms. His Highness has reason to know that this Manfredini is in Rome and

muddying the water, the better to fish in it. He intends to steal the *Ace of Hearts* and keep it up his sleeve, hoping to make a fine profit on his cards. But this His Highness is determined not to suffer it. The said Abbé shall be warned to return home at once from Rome, else it will cost His Highness nothing to hear the last of him" (*farla finita con esso lui*). And finally :

"What you advised me through the soprano singer (*il musico*) Sandro, that there might be risk in touching that Abbé, he being already in possession of certain facts and perhaps already selling his wares to the great merchants beyond the Alps, most certainly points to prudence. But His Highness is more and more incensed with this fellow's impudence who has long since deserved the law's rigour for illicit alchemy and worse, let alone his notorious atheism ; and if he meddles any further in the question of the mislaid crown jewel His Highness is greatly minded to suppress him altogether and with no more ado."

I keep racking my brains as to who this

“ ace of hearts ” and “ mislaid crown jewel ” and “ successor of Mahomet ” can be. Isn't it odd that in seeking for details of the death of the obscure protégé of your ancestors we should have come upon the traces of some mysterious personage about whom the various courts seem to be intriguing ? I had thought of Monmouth, Charles II.'s son, but the dates don't fit. I wonder whether this may lead to some brand new theory about that intolerable bore, the Man in the Iron Mask, and reinstate the old wives' tale of a twin brother of Louis XIV. ?

But I have taken up too much of your time with matters which do not concern Louis Norbert and perhaps don't interest you ; forgive. By the way, have you no documents at Arthington concerning the date of birth and the parentage of your young Frenchman ?

And if not, are there no family traditions as to his origin ?

How I wish I might have the honour of assisting you in your Muniment Room, which will, I hope, make up for the failure of my own attempts. I am, dear Lady Venetia,

Yours, etc.

LETTER IX

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington : May 10, 1909

MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

Good heavens! What marvellous, patient creatures you historians must be! I am beginning to appreciate you and your virtues after six mortal mornings spent in that detestable Muniment Room.

For it is a sickening place. I had expected dust and cobwebs, perhaps a few broken twigs brought by rooks, like one sees in church towers; or even (didn't I long for it as a child!) a huge magpie's nest with chicks sitting on the family's long-lost tea spoons. But I never bargained for a dull orderliness like a country solicitor's, and under that nothing but the most sordid accounts with an illegible writing and without a vestige of

spelling (even *I* feel sick at it !). Nothing but how much farmers paid, how much corn horses got, what was spent on repair of harness (*item* for a "surcingle to her laddyship her mair," and suchlike) and making of liveries. Of course I know it's only because I am so frivolous that it all bores me to tears. I suppose you learned folk would find out all manner of interesting things. But it is a bit rough upon me, coming to a place athirst for romance and mystery. And so far not a vestige of anything of the sort have I come upon. How I *do* envy you all those dear spies and "successors of Mahomet" and villainous abbés, and even "Berenice with her crazy brain" in your Pisan archives !

Not a word, of course, about Louis Norbert ! Nothing but a growing conviction that however poor a figure we Thesigers may be cutting nowadays (all blue Tories and dunces !) the Thesigers of the past were a set of horrible old screws, as is proved (if all they write about didn't show it) by their squalid economies of writing paper, crossing in every conceivable and inconceivable sense, abbreviating half

their words and writing on backs of letters and torn-out fly-leaves of books. They have pretty well broken my spirit, and if Louis Norbert doesn't make his appearance to-morrow morning, I shall give him up as a bad job and never set foot again in that odious Muniment Room!

Thursday.

I wrote like that on Monday, and, as if he had heard me, Louis Norbert *has* turned up! At least, I mean, a reference to him has.

On Thursday I had what I thought was my last go at the Muniment Room, and behold! I found a box of letters (so nice and yellow and with such lovely f's and s's like fiddle clefs—the very look of them made my heart beat). And inside was an index (which of course wasn't an index) by the usual Rev. Rupert Thesiger, D.D., stating that in 1753 he had "put the contents in order (which wasn't a bit true) and that among it were some interesting letters of Sir Anthony Thesiger, Bart., afterwards Viscount," etc., etc., "during a journey to Paris in 1683."

1683! The year before Louis Norbert's death! And sure enough, in one of them of Sept. 16th, 1683, there was a mention of Louis Norbert! Just think how I felt! It was the *fourth* time I have seen his name (on the picture, on the epitaph, on the Rev. Rupert's inventory of portraits, and now)—that I have seen his beloved name except written by you or me. Just think of that! But then archæologists are accustomed to such emotions, digging up Troy and the Olympia Hermes and things like that.

Well, Anthony Thesiger writes to his mother (the widow Dame Priscilla I told you of) from Paris. And after endless enumeration of all the fine folk he met at the Court of Louis XIV. (a rare young snob my ancestor was), and masses of description, which his poor old mother couldn't possibly have followed, of the palaces and gardens of Marly and Versailles, he suddenly ends off: "Your adopted Son is in no danger of being seduced to Popery (as you seem to apprehend) by the sight of all this magnificence. He looks upon these polite and delightful splendours with the

eyes of a Cato and compareth this place (Versailles) to Babel in the building and the builder thereof to Ahab and Pharaoh by reason of his cruel dealings with the Huguenots and the great lavishness of his court in the midst of much misery of the poor, whereat he noticeth justly, those accustomed to our happier country can scarce believe their senses, so ragged and starved do all the husbandmen of France appear. I have tried to soften our friend's ferocious virtue, to sacrifice, as they choicely say here, to the Graces, but so far all in vain."

"Like Babel in the building." Those are the very first words that Louis Norbert has uttered in our presence, dear Professor, and of *course* they are *exactly* what we should have expected of him, just exactly what *we* ourselves would have thought (for I'm a Socialist, aren't you?), and he's a *friend*, and it doesn't matter, does it, how long ago friends may have been born and died, they always know and love each other when they meet! I always thought that if Louis Norbert had lived in our day he would have been a sort of Cunninghame

Graham (how awfully good those last stories of his are !) and held pro-Ferrer meetings in Trafalgar Square, and ridden a mustang and gone to prison for his opinions, and all the time dreadfully an aristocrat and hating publicity.

And how exactly like that mean-spirited young Thesiger (I have not bothered to copy his grotesque, illiterate misspelling) to want Louis Norbert to "sacrifice to the graces" and enjoy all these "polite and delightful splendours"—he, I mean Thesiger, the son of a Cromwellian stalwart and "Avenge O Lord thy murdered Saints" sort of person. Of *course* Louis Norbert just wouldn't, and merely quoted the Bible, which, after all, is a deal finer than all their Corneilles and Bossuets and the other things in the *Cours de Dictées* we were bored with.

By the way, how did our delightful young Huguenot come to be buried in a Catholic cemetery? Surely some part of that villainous Abbé's plot!

These words of our dear Louis Norbert (I can't get over their happening to have just been his first to us!) have brought home to me

how much I have always loathed Louis XIV. and his court. It isn't really because of the *Cours de Dictées* and the six months I was made to spend at a school at Versailles. I've been back there time after time, and often in awfully good company (I like dining there after a hot day in Paris, don't you—much better than the Bois); but all the Louis XIV. part has *always* seemed to me utterly dull and pompous (just think of Villa d'Este at Tivoli or even the Boboli gardens!), except when autumn makes it untidy and—is it the right word?—*elegiac*. And just think what it must have looked like when it was all new, tons and tons of brand new stone, and stucco like whipped cream, and trees the size of brussels sprouts, and lamentable, transplanted saplings wilting away in the gravel! “Like Babel in the building, and the builder like Ahab or Pharaoh”—how true, and what a real *friend* Louis Norbert proves to be! Indeed he is far too lenient in his judgment, like all nice people (Cunninghame Graham, whom he's so like, when he writes in the *Clarion* against capitalists). I mean about

Louis XIV. For I rather liked Ahab in Renan's *Peuple d'Israel* (Jezebel was *rather* grande dame, don't you think?), and as to Pharaoh, of course Louis Norbert had never been in Egypt, else he could never have been so disrespectful to those wonderful statues as to think of them in the same breath with that odious, bedizened vulgarian of a Roi Soleil. So like a magnified, vulgarised Sir Willoughby Patterne, with "he has a leg" (though I always think Meredith overdoes that leg!), perpetually posing and expecting the women to do all the love-making and the faithfulness! Faugh! And all those sickening grandees waiting about for him to pass (and the pompous wretch used to complain if they weren't there every day and every hour, do you remember?) in hopes of getting a tabouret or an office or money at the end of ten or fifteen years of bowing and scraping. Don't you hate the silly way that people, particularly old ladies with intellectual pretensions, say to one, "My dear, you *must* read Mme. de Motteville—or the Cardinal de Retz"—or "Do let me lend you a volume of Saint Simon

—he is such a psychologist, my dear, and such exquisite wit," etc., etc., etc., when they ought to be *ashamed* of reading all that abominable gossip, like the lowest society papers and much more indecent, and all the cock and bull poisoning of people with pounded diamonds in *eau de chicorée* (of course pounded glass would have been too cheap for such *grandees*!). How I loathe it all, and how glad I am Louis Norbert loathed it also! That brute of a Louis XIV., behaving like that to poor Mlle. de La Vallière! And how like him to end off with marrying a retired governess—so just what he *would* do. And then that little niece of Mazarin whom he jilted—what was her name? She *did* score off him when he sent her away and she said, "*Vous êtes Roi, Sire, et vous pleurez et me laissez partir.*" I hope it's true and that he felt properly humiliated once in a way. Wasn't her name *Berenice*, like the lady of your Pisan spies—or why do I associate her with that? Isn't it a play by Racine, *dreadfully* dull, but which one's French friends pretend to find *exquis*—and all exclaim

(you know their tone) "oh-o-o-o-oh—" about?

Write to me at once what YOU think of Louis Norbert's first appearance on our scene; and whether you don't think all he says about Versailles and Louis XIV. so true.

Yours, etc.

LETTER X

From the Archæologist to Lady Venetia

Pisa : May 18, 1909

DEAR LADY VENETIA,

I am so glad you foresaw how enchanted I should be at Louis Norbert not disappointing your search, and making his appearance upon (as you are kind enough to word it) *our* scene. And particularly with sentiments so very much in harmony with your own, in which I have the honour of quite

concurring. I am moreover quite personally obliged to your interesting and mysterious seventeenth-century friend for having, however unintentionally, elicited the enchanting attack on Louis XIV. which you have done me the honour of addressing to me. I believe it to be of extraordinary historical value ; and I keep reading and re-reading it with infinite enjoyment.

By a curious coincidence, I believe you have already solved, if not the riddle of your young Frenchman's end (but this will surely come out of your Muniment Room !), at all events one of the two historical mysteries I have come upon during my, unfortunately still fruitless, researches in these Pisan archives. You have discovered the identity of that enigmatic *Berenice* whose crazy fancies somehow exercised the Grand Duke of Tuscany's spies and diplomatists. Of course she was Marie Mancini, Mazarin's niece, and widow of the Constable Colonna. I ought to have guessed it at once, but it required your nimbler wits to put two and two together. You associated Mazarin's niece and "*vous*

êtes Roi, Sire, et vous pleurez et me laissez partir”—with Racine’s *Berenice* for the excellent reason that that play (on which I find you unduly severe) was suggested by Marie Mancini’s treatment at Louis XIV.’s hands. Titus, who sacrifices his love for the Jewish princess to the *Raison d’Etat* of ancient Rome is Louis XIV. ; Berenice, who refuses to be jilted, is Marie Mancini, and so the Grand Duke and the Grand Ducal spies would naturally allude to her by that stage name. It is transparent ; only it took you to see it ! And the crazy fancy which frightened the Grand Duke was doubtless one of this lady’s many schemes for forcing her way into the royal presence and attempting to reassert her former sway upon her quondam would-be bridegroom.

Being, alas ! unable to send you any news of Louis Norbert (although I *did* send you some in my last of the Abbé you suspected of having murdered him), I shall take the liberty of posting you a rather delightful little book by Arvède Barine, which I happen to have by me (don’t return it, it is of no value),

containing a most entertaining account of the *Berenice* in question.

She is really rather a fascinating creature, the most wonderful of those wonderful *Mazarines*, all with tragic or romantic adventures and splendid names: Olympe, Hortense, Laure, Soissons, Mercœur, Mazarin, Conti, and so forth, amazons, wits, saints, astrologers or poisoneresses, driving seventeenth-century princes and ambassadors and prelates distracted with their charms, their ambitions, or their crimes.

Marie was the strangest of this handful of dangerous and amusing sirens, who were always scouring from one end of Europe to the other—Savoy to Spain, Rome to Brussels, sometimes dressed as men (Marie herself escaped from her Colonna husband in men's clothes and was very nearly taken by Corsairs and to the Great Turk's harem), sometimes dressed in the most genuine rags (do you remember Madame de Sévigné's daughter lending her shifts?), now receiving the College of Cardinals in bed, now being put under lock and key in convents and fortresses; making

verses, playing the guitar, drawing horoscopes, and two of them, Olympe and Marianne, brought before the magistrates for poisoning. But I am merely spoiling Arvède Barine's little book for you with my pedantic summary. Forgive my dullness, as well as my (I trust temporary) inability to find any traces of Louis Norbert, and believe me, dear Lady Venetia,

Yours, etc.

PS.—Should the little book I am sending have the good fortune of interesting you in the Berenice whom you have so happily identified, there are two thick (and rather dull) volumes about her by Lucien Perrey which you will certainly be able to get from the London Library.

LETTER XI

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington : May 31

MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

I have found two more mentions of Louis Norbert in Anthony Thesiger's letters to his mother. (I must say that ancestor of mine is rather nice with the old lady, though he *was* a snob trying to make L. N. admire Versailles.)

The first is of Oct. 21, 1683. He writes :

“ You need be under no apprehensions about your adopted son. These Frenchmen know not the difference between strangers. None of them guesses that *Norbert* is not an English name, and his French they find much less excellent than mine.” (What a coxcomb!) “ He consorteth only with persons of our own nation and a few learned men of Paris, and his

heresy is accounted the fault of being English. I have moreover always believed that there was but little truth in what we were told of his parents being Protestants ruined by Mazarin. I am informed that up to the rigorous measures of his present Majesty, the Protestants of this Kingdom have not been maltreated although they were in Savoy already in Oliver's time. Also I am informed that the only family bearing your adopted son's name is one of very small gentry, or as they say here, *hobereaux*, in Gascony, and has suffered no exiles or other severities. But you well know what my dear father always thought." —(Evidently Dame Priscilla did *not* think what Arthington thinks about L. N.'s birth, and there must be some further mystery.)

The *second* mention of L. N. is in a letter of Nov. 20, 1683. By the way, these letters were carried "by His Excellency's Gentleman" or by "a safe opportunity of His Lordship of Elgin returning home," not by the post.

Well, it appears that a lawsuit had arisen requiring the presence of Anthony Thesiger. He therefore gives up, very unwillingly, the

remainder of his stay in France and his intended journey to Italy. He tells his mother that he will travel with all diligence to Arthington, hoping to arrive there in about ten days' time "if the sea be calm," but that her "adopted son" has already left Paris for Rome by way of Marseilles and Leghorn, with some personage who is called merely "his Lordship" and who is evidently some young gentleman with a numerous company of bear-leaders, for he adds: "Your adopted son will find himself at ease in this society, particularly by reason of his Lordship's tutor and interpreter, the learned Mr. Humphrey Standish, who is well acquainted with the antiquities and other rarities of Italy, besides being no mean physician and a philosopher in correspondence with the famous Academy of the Lynxes. His Lordship is likewise followed by a good musician, Mr. Bob Lowndes, who is, in truth, in orders and serves as travelling chaplain in Popish countries."

After which reassurances to the old lady's Protestantism he goes on: "Despite what I writ to you in my last, I have since such

information and suspicions as make me none the less pleased your adopted son should stay no longer in this country, but have cleared out before I leave it."

Isn't that all very mysterious? Then—the story of the dangers run by L. N.'s family proved true after all. Or else perhaps Anthony had discovered that L. N. really belonged to some *other* family which did entail danger or disgrace. How could one find out *who* was likely to be in disgrace or danger about the time of L. N.'s birth—I suppose about 1660 wouldn't it be, since the tombstone says he died at twenty-four?

I mean, of course, in France; I mean, of course, sufficiently in disgrace for an orphan to have been spirited away to England by old Nicholas Thesiger. Would the *Fronde* be any kind of use? I have a dim idea it—whatever it was—took place about that time, but perhaps it's all nonsense—I mean my idea, not the *Fronde*, though I daresay that was nonsense too.

You told me you were "working up" the origins of Pisan architecture in the twelfth

century. That seems rather a far cry. But I have a notion, dear Professor, that knowing about any history you must know about all ! So do be kind and look in your memory for some family which *mysteriously came to grief* ABOUT 1660.

Yours, etc.

LETTER XII

From the Archæologist to Lady Venetia

Pisa : June 3, 1909

DEAR LADY VENETIA,

I congratulate you on your further success ! You ask what family was likely to be in danger in France, or persecuted or extinguished there about 1660 ? I shall put the question, which is beyond my competence, to a French historian whom I expect to see in a few days in Florence, where, by the way, I will have a hunt for traces of Louis Norbert

among such documents as have been removed from Pisa. My learned but rather uncommunicative friend may be willing to part with some of his carefully-secreted knowledge in return for what I can tell him about the Grand Ducal spies having been all agog about a mysterious "Ace of Hearts" who was abroad in Italy at the time of Louis Norbert's death, as I think I told you.

I am very glad you have given me this opportunity of showing my zeal for Louis Norbert, and removing an impression my last letter may have given, that I have transferred my interest to Berenice.

That discovery—I mean her identity with Marie Mancini—is yours, not mine ; and that is my only reason for being interested in it.

You seem to think that your discoveries have come to an end with the Reverend Rupert's boxful. Do not be so impatient with your Muniment Room ! Do remember what you have already discovered for yourself, namely, that our ancestors (or rather *yours*, for I don't know whether a man called Schmidt has any) were excessively avaricious

of paper, and apt to turn old documents to unexpected uses. Only last week the daughter of Marchese Viscardi (that exquisite old antiquarian I met the day that you left Pisa) showed me a list of Turkish galley slaves and their rations (of food and perhaps also of lashes) which she had discovered as the stiffening of a brocade chalice-cover in their chapel. So expect to find news of Louis Norbert wherever—well, wherever you least expect it.

Besides, there are other and perhaps better ways of getting news of him. Do you remember writing to me that if I could find out nothing I was to “make it up”? Well, I venture to say the same to you—*invent!* it is but another form of the Latin word which means *to discover!* One of the evenings I had the honour of passing with you and your cousins at Pisa, I shall never forget how you entertained us all with the doings of a romantic German couple—his name was *Hermann* and hers, I *think*, *Isabella*—yes, *Hermann* and *Isabella Süsskind*, and their sentimental adventures with a certain bassoon (or was it double bass?) player and an Italian landlady

who possessed a small boy called *Italo*—Italo who was always expected to catch cold. The bassoon player aroused fearful jealousy in this lady's husband, and somehow also in Hermann, by his unfailing alacrity in helping little Italo into his great-coat. Do you remember? And then, when you had told us exactly what each of them had felt and said, you explained suddenly that none of these people had ever existed outside your own imagination, and you seemed considerably incredulous when your ambassador cousin admitted that he had never possessed any Hermanns and Isabellas and bassoon players and Italos of his own!

Well—how shall I put it? *Invent* your Louis Norbert. Believe me, you have begun already, long, long ago, when you first saw his portrait in your childhood. Why not continue? After all, are not all the persons in whom we take the most vivid interest just, to that extent, creations of our own? And what is loving people except making them up to please one's heart's desire?

I am, dear Lady Venetia,

Yours, etc.

LETTER XIII

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington : June 10, 1909

DEAR PROFESSOR,

I hate you, and your "inventions." Can't you tell the difference between a creature making up absurdities about Hermanns and Isabellas and bassoon players (as if everybody didn't, except my "ambassador cousin," as you call him) and a woman taking quite an inconceivable trouble—hours and days in the Muniment Room—about a real historical personage, almost a member of her own family, in whom she has been *deeply* interested all her life? It is really disappointing; I mean *you* are!

Many thanks for the little book about the Mazarin nieces. It is, I admit, amusing, and shows the French Court in a more supportable

light. I ought to be grateful, and I am, only I feel it was somehow intended to help me to, as you put it, *invent*, as if *inventing* were what I was bent on. And never have I felt less inclined to *make up*, to turn Louis Norbert into a Hermann and Isabella (really, how you could !) than at this moment. For this very day *I have come into his real presence*, the first time since, as a small girl, I discovered his portrait ; and really, I don't think I have had such another emotion between that time and this !

I have discovered two whole long—very long—letters of Louis Norbert. Do you understand ? *Letters in his own writing*, giving his own impressions of Italy to my ancestor Anthony Thesiger. They were in quite another box of papers, on a topmost shelf.

You really do not deserve to hear anything about it, you with your “*invent*” ! But after all, you have only just taken to such odious ideas, and up to now you have really been a great dear about Louis Norbert. And I daresay you are no longer in that stupid frame of mind (I suppose it's some new-fangled

pose of you *jeunes*!), pretending that when one is interested in people it's because they don't really exist except in one's own wonderful brain. Besides, I love copying these letters; I've already copied them once, and I'm going to learn to typewrite in order to copy them tidily.

The first is signed "your less, but more than brother L. N." And it is addressed, on the back of the first sheet:

To Sir Anthony Thesiger, Bart. of Arthington Manor, my honoured Master, these, favoured by the Duke of Winchester his Grace. Rome, Jan. 5, 1684 N.S. (New Style).

Here they both are, dear Professor, with my forgiveness.

Your deeply misunderstood *old* friend,

V. H.

PS.—I have not copied the misspellings. And there aren't more of them, very likely, than in my own letters.

LETTER XIV

From Louis Norbert to Sir Anthony Thesiger

When we had crossed the Ciminian forest, Sir Christopher and I and other gentlemen riding on horseback alongside of his Lordship's coach, each with his pistols at half-cock, and the servants with blunderbusses for fear of outlaws in those lonely places, we saw over against us a blue mountain rising out of a green and empty valley, which Mr. Humphrey Standish, my Lord's interpreter, and a great antiquarian, pointed out to us as Mons. Soracte, of which Horace sayeth :

*"Vides ut alta stet nive Candidum
Soracte."*

And Virgil, in his *Æneis* :

"Summe deum sancti custos Soractis Apollo."

But our way lay only across big green moors, for leagues without a house or cottage,

bare and covered with coarse dry grass whereon pale cattle were browsing, with here and there a gnarled oak whose trunk was raw for tearing off its bark whereof the Italians make cork, a cruel sight, methought, and fitting this forsaken country in which it became hourly more difficult to believe that we should come upon the former capital of the world, and, as Papists pretend, of Christendom ; or indeed, any place at all with civil inhabitants and customs.

Yet not an hour later we came in sight of an infinite number of towers and domes, among which our postillions pointed out the vastest as of the famous Church of St. Peter. And soon after, having crossed a great muddy river which was the Tiber, we rode under a gateway and into a huge enclosure adorned magnificently with fountains and an Egyptian obelisk, a curiosity I had never seen or heard described, being in shape much like a needle or thorn, but of basalt or other hard stone, and over a hundred feet in height with four basalt lions spewing water into tanks at its base.

LETTER XV

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington : June 11, 1909

MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

After all, I sent you only *one* of L. N.'s letters yesterday. I wanted you to have time to enjoy it thoroughly ; *what* a poet he was and how nice about Horace and Virgil—at least, it was nice in him, for I can recollect thinking them a great bore when my grandfather used to quote them over his port.

Well, to-day I am sending you the second one, *which is even more wonderful*. When I think of all those silly, mémoire-reading old dotties with their St. Simon and so on, I should like them to see this. (No, I should *hate* them to, and no one except you shall ever see L. N.'s letters as long as I'm at Arthington.)

PS.—On recopying the letter (I am not going

to bother with the queer spelling, final *e*'s and so forth, it would look like faking, like "Ye Olde Tea-Rooms," etc.)—well, on recopying, it strikes me that L. N. must have been drawing the long bow a little about Italian wickedness; what do you think? When people have such a gift for writing they are apt to become just a bit abusive, as I always tell Cunninghame Graham. But, after all, perhaps they all richly deserved it, just as the capitalists do nowadays. I seem rather incoherent; it's because this is really *too* wonderful and exciting, isn't it?

Yours, etc.

LETTER XVI

From Louis Norbert to Sir A. Thesiger

Rome : January 15, 1684 N.S.

MY FRIEND AND EXCELLENT MASTER,

You ask me how I like Italy and its inhabitants. They are, indeed, of admirable

learning and refinement, passing that, methinks, of the French, by reason of their sweetness and simplicity.

Thus I have been entertained with infinite kindness and wit by certain learned men, disciples of the famous *Galileo*, at *Florence*; where we sojourned some weeks on our way from the sea. The towns also are incredibly magnificent, not only for their many curious and beautiful monuments of variegated precious marbles, but also the great number of splendid private houses, rightly called *palaces*, of all the persons of consequence and even of the lesser citizens. These are never of wood, or brick, but of stone, symmetrical, lofty, the windows strangely high, and having interiorly a fine pillared yard with paved columnades for shade and rain, with often a noble fountain or antique statue in the centre. The very streets are paved as is the habit to pave only palaces in other countries, with broad stone flags, smooth and united, whereon there is no mud and coaches roll as smooth as in a courtyard. The squares before the principal edifices are vast and regular, with

abundance of water playing in marble basins among the feet of huge colossi.

These people live with incredible delicacy and a cleanliness so nice that they have open lofts upon their roofs, whereon to dry their linen, whereof they have strange abundance. Likewise they make incredible provision for the sick, not in paltry wooden alms-houses, but in such lofty hospitals they look like churches, where the infirm are attended by the most famous chirurgeons and physicians like the celebrated Monsieur Malpighi ; also they have profusion of excellent music, both in their great theatres and churches, some of which I am causing to be copied for you, in especial that of *Carissimi*, who is for this country as *Mr. Purcell* or *Lully* for England and France ; also a famous Sicilian, one *Scarletto*.

I am also causing drawings to be made of rare statues and collecting prints of the finest pictures and architecture, of which the excellence and abundance passeth believing.

The splendour and politeness and their loving kindness towards strangers maketh it

difficult to credit what one is told of the manifold wickedness of this country. Yet it is so, as the natives themselves all too readily admit. Every man doeth justice and taketh vengeance for himself, and the life of a man is held no more sacred than a pullet's. Duels are fought here in the Spanish fashion, the seconds engaging and often getting killed along with the principals in such manner that the streets become no better than a shambles, for some trifle of one coach taking precedence, or a dispute of saucy chair-men. And this is greatly increased by the rabble of ruffians whom all persons of quality find fit to dangle at their heels, rarely going forth without a guard of cut-throats, whose rags are barely hidden under the liveries and silver badges which place them, like their patrons, impunely out of the law's reach. And as if such defiance of God's command, "Thou shalt not kill," sufficed not for their pride and hatred, they add to this flaunted violence wherein their person is at least exposed, all kind of secret, sudden, and dastardly murder at the

hands of their servants, of whom certain, called *bravos*, or, as we should say, bullies or swashbucklers, are kept openly by these nobles, for the avowed purpose of executing their vengeance.

More than once already, since we disembarked in this country, it has happened that some person we had met at an assembly was thus dispatched by salaried spadassins or been obliged to pass into some neighbouring principality (whereof Italy affords a convenient number) to escape less the pursuit of justice, which winks and turns a deaf ear to the evil doings of people of birth, than the wrath of an injured family.

More than once hath it happened to me, and his Lordship's other companions, to hear screams of murder even in broad daylight, and find a corpse weltering in blood round some blind corner or under an archway, on which occasion the street empties as if by miracle, those about vanishing like rats into drains, while doors and shutters are incontinently barred for fear of being called on to give evidence, it being the custom that those in

authority should hide their impotence towards high-born offenders by racking and tormenting any poor devils they may sweep up on their way. After which the murdered man is thrown across a barrow, or carried away by one of the congregations of mercy, cowed and masked, with torch and taper, and fitter, methinks, to strike terror than bring comfort.

Indeed, I will tell you privily that it would seem as if his Lordship's self had once been the intended victim of such villainous attempts, thanks doubtless to his carrying the so-called gallantries of King Charles's Court into a country as profligate indeed, but where a show of jealousy is enforced by fashion and maintained by such practices as above described. For going to a concert of music at Cardinal Chigi's, Mr. Lowndes and myself and an Italian gentleman in one of his Lordship's coaches, one day that my Lord had been let blood and kept the house, some ruffians, thinking he was one of us, discharged a volley from blunderbusses as we passed beneath the Arch of Portugal so called, breaking a glass and grazing a footman's cheek, and what was

stranger, piercing my hat with a slug without wounding me, and this by the mercy of God and the interposition of an ostrich feather.

Do not, I pray you, communicate this circumstance to the lady your mother, who might be concerned for my safety, which is perfect, that murderous attack being notoriously directed to his Lordship and not to me, whose religion as well as natural moodiness preserve from giving umbrage to any man, even in this strange and dangerous land.

Vouchsafe to hold me in your affection, as I shall ever hold you and all yours in my devout and loving gratitude.

Your obedient servant,

L. N.

LETTER XVII

From the Archæologist to Lady Venetia

Villa Viscardi, Evola, Prov. di Pisa,

June 12, 1909

DEAR LADY VENETIA,

Your letter enclosing the first of Louis Norbert's made me feel that through some unintended and so far unintelligible gaucherie I had forfeited the right of taking any further interest in the personage who interests you. Indeed, I had decided not to intrude any more letters upon you, feeling as I do rather paralysed by the fear of again incurring your displeasure without even understanding why or wherein ; a woman of the world like you cannot know what it is to feel oneself hopelessly awkward just where one would least wish to be so.

Excuse all this talk about myself, which

does not diminish my *gaffe!* But I wish to explain my silence, and also the unpardonable rudeness (I seem perpetually committing the *unpardonable sin*, and, like religious persons, not knowing in what it consists) of delaying to return you the copies of both the letters which you have kindly communicated to me. Owing to my absence from Pisa, the second was delayed; I got it only yesterday here in the country. You are quite right in considering them as very interesting documents, nor has the very slight study I have made of the Italian seventeenth century (mainly in the archives in your service) led me to tax Louis Norbert with any exaggeration in his account of the lawlessness then existing. I have just been looking over an interesting volume, "Vita Barrocca," by the well-known antiquarian Corrado Ricci, who repeatedly sums up the state of Italy between 1650 and 1700 in exactly the same manner.

I ought to add, perhaps, that I have been less fortunate than you, in so far as I have been unable to discover any mention of Louis

Norbert's *name*. It is true that documents have lately come under my notice which *may* contain certain important references to him, but this is mere conjecture, and such as to expose me once more to the reproach of suggesting that you should *invent*, which I did, I assure you, in the most respectful intention, and, I might almost add, in a truly scientific spirit. For a hypothesis is a scientific *invention*, and after your identification of the *Berenice* of the Grand Ducal spies with Mazarin's niece, I wished to encourage you to make a further hypothetical identification towards which some of our facts seemed, in a way, to point. Be this as it may, I cannot sufficiently express my regret that my advice should have been such as to deserve your displeasure.

I am, dear Lady Venetia,
Yours regretfully, etc.

LETTER XVIII

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington : June 24, 1909

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIEND,

What *are* you talking about? What is all this nonsense about *displeasure* and *rudeness*? Never have I suggested such a thing! If anyone has been rude it has been I. (Although I *must* say you did rile me with your Mazarin nieces book and your *invent* and your inconceivable bracketing of L. N. with Hermann and Isabella). Well, I mean if anyone *has* been rude or committing *gaffes*, it is always sure to be I; and worse than *rude*, *ungrateful* in forgetting even for an instant how infinitely patient and sympathetic you have shown yourself in this matter, which, after all, concerns only me.

It is so long since you last wrote, and this letter of to-day has an unknown address, so I

don't even understand *where* you are ; that is why I don't send you the copy of some other letters of Louis Norbert's which I have recently discovered, *very* extraordinary and mysterious letters I am sure you will say. Please let me know where I can send them, and whether you will get them if I *register* them? Italian country posts are sometimes unaccountable in their methods.

Yours, etc.

PS.—What are the new references to L. N. which you think you have found? And what do you mean by saying that perhaps they involve *inventions*? Please explain by return of post.

LETTER XIX

From the Archæologist to Lady Venetia

Villa Viscardi, Evola, Prov. di Pisa,

July 1, 1909

DEAR LADY VENETIA,

I hasten to thank you for your gracious forgiveness of my stupidity, of which the worst was thinking I had offended you.

There is no danger in sending your copies here even if you do not register them. You have, I see, got thoroughly in touch with Louis Norbert's century as regards fear of the post. Or have *femmes du monde* always a preference for registering?—registration and telegrams, isn't that a generalisation worthy of your friend Henry James?

Well, if you will not invent, it is not my place to urge you to frame a hypothesis. Only you must allow your humble scientific friend to desist, on his part, from precipitate formulation of the one he sees looming before us.

I am, dear Lady Venetia,
Yours, etc.

XX

Telegram from Lady Venetia to the Archæologist
Arthington : July 5, 1909

DEAR PROFESSOR,

Earnestly request formulate historical hypothesis.—HAMMOND.

Reply paid

XXI

*Telegram from the Archæologist to Lady
Venetia*

Evola, Prov. di Pisa : July 6, 1909

Infinitely regret disobey request. Premature formulation always dangerous. Respectful greetings. Letter follows.

LETTER XXII

From the Archæologist to Lady Venetia

Villa Viscardi : July 6, 1909

DEAR LADY VENETIA,

I cannot at present explain why (and the scientific reasons would be a mere impertinence) I was obliged to telegraph yesterday declining to formulate any hypothesis. Allow your humble servant merely to

explain that for the present saying "formulate" to him is exactly the same as saying "*invent*" to you.

As regards the documents I alluded to, I cannot as yet tell you much about them, for the simple reason (among others, however) that I cannot as yet read them; I mean that they are, if they exist at all and are not mere imagination (like Hermann and Isabella), in cypher, or rather *cryptogram* (not mushrooms!). That is to say, that, *if they exist*, they exist in single words and phrases which must be picked out of books according to a clue which has in each case to be discovered.

This much, however, I can tell you—these documents (if documents they prove to be) form part of the library of that learned Pisan Abbess Artemisia del Valore, who was, in her young and worldly days, a crowned poetess (like Corinne!), and whose compositions you think so interesting. This library, or rather a very small selection thereof, she did not give to her convent when she took the veil in 1687, but handed to a cousin who had then recently married the head of the Viscardi family.

And it is in the library of Marchese Viscardi's villa that I have discovered these books once belonging to the Abbess, and in them—*well*, the documents which are perhaps, after all, mere coincidence and fancy.

Feeling a little (and quite unreasonably) discouraged by your aversion to *inventing* (forgive my reverting to this incident), I gave the good-bye to Louis Norbert and accepted the invitation of Marchese Viscardi to spend some weeks in a villa of his which happens to be within a walk of some curious *Proto-Pisan* churches, which I am drawing and measuring and photographing in the company of this delightful old man, while helping him with the "Guide to the Mediæval Antiquities of the Pisan Province," upon which he has been engaged some thirty years.

It was his unmarried daughter, the same young lady who had found the list of galley-slaves in the chalice-cover, who first got wind of the cryptogram and the clue to it; and it is she (she has an amazing archæological *flair*) who is now helping me in my attempt to decipher these (supposed) documents.

It would amuse you to see us poring over the mystery after dinner by the big round table in the great *sala* of the villa, portraits of ancestors in scarlet and armour, and immense heads of wild boars looking down on us from under the dimly-lit, far-off arches, while the rest of this hospitable family and their country guests amuse themselves with reviews and illustrateds, and the dear old Marchese takes his nap like an Elizabethan Grandee's effigy of painted alabaster more than ever. . . . The end of my sentence has got lost in my vain attempt to make you see this extraordinary characteristic and charming Italian interior. If only I were a novelist instead of a mere plodding pedant, *what* romantic things I could write about this great old house, of noblest, simplest architecture, where you find your way to bed by the light of an oil lamp in a corner of the great sounding corridors hung with portraits and coats of arms, and there is an old spinet outside my door and a perch for combing out periwigs in the closet alongside of my bath-tub!

Well, there we are, the Marchesina and I, poring over old yellow volumes of the *Pastor*

Fido, of Virgil, and other classics, and books on natural science having belonged to the learned, the once gloriously crowned, Abbess, and over piles of manuscript music, in search of faint, faint marginal marks which mean that here she is (so at least we imagine) addressing her correspondent, or being so addressed by this mysterious, anonymous, *perhaps non-existent*, (quite as non-existent as Hermann and Isabella !) creature. Meanwhile around us the rest of the company discuss the coming vintage, the municipal elections, the shooting of the various boars on the walls, until perhaps the Marchese suddenly awakes, quite on the spot, and inconceivably courteous and dignified, and joins in with some amazingly exact and to the point piece of chronology, or natural history, or family tradition. Or else some of the innumerable batches of grandchildren troop in, delightful hoydens masquerading in the garments of the guests mixed with those of long-deceased ancestors, and extemporise charades or play riddles in verse which the old butler has composed and laid alongside the menu.

It sounds like nothing at all when I write it, and it is, in reality, such an incomparable mixture of the past and present, spacious, airy, friendly, simple and yet full of mysterious shadows and gleanings. . . . I often think how much it would appeal to your (I mean no offence) imagination and love of romance.

The Marchesina has inherited her father's antiquarian gifts. She is, besides, an excellent horsewoman (and it takes one to deal with her Maremma colts!), and knows more about plants and animals than any naturalist of my acquaintance, or any schoolboy (for she has pet toads and suchlike); she knows all about the real life of the peasantry, and can tell me their biographies like one of themselves, as well as their fairy tales and poetry. And with all this a certain shy self-irony, with a charm like the bitter of mountain herbs. Some day you must really know her and her father.

Meanwhile, and until the cypher of the Abbess has been mastered, I will merely tell you that we have made out—or imagine we have made out (for *we* invent, dear Lady

Venetia)—that Artemisia, before her religious time, engaged in a clandestine correspondence by means of books and music borrowed and returned; and that the subject of this correspondence was to warn some person in whom she took an interest against the machinations of his enemies. The idea arose in my mind (and was accepted by the Marchesina's almost intuitive knowledge of the past of her fellow countrymen) that there must be some reason for the verse

*“Heu! fuge crudeles terras, fuge littus
avarum”*

being not only underlined in a fine elzevir Virgil, but copied out on the flyleaf of the same book in a large, bold hand; and that at the end of the Virgil there was a note—“Vide Æneid: LIB II. versus 44”—which verse was no other than that same admonition to “fly from these cruel shores.” Indeed it was this arrangement which first led us to notice that the backs of some of the Abbess's books contained lists of pages corresponding to underlined verses or single words, thus constituting a sort of little code or dictionary.

Besides the verse in question the Virgil contains faint pencillings under the words "enemies"—"danger"—"death," and the word "*dapes*" and every other meaning food. In short, we have come to the (perhaps over-hasty) conclusion that the lady whose music you admired was carrying on an elaborate secret correspondence in order to warn someone against *poison*.

"Those were the days of Acqua Tofana," remarked the Marchesina with a slight shrug, as she might have said, "These are the days of telephones"—and turning to her father—"È vero Babbo?" she continued, "they were always poisoning or getting poisoned, or thinking they were getting poisoned, in the seventeenth century." "Eh già," answered the Marchese from his newspaper; "you remember the case of our cousin Lanfreducci's Neapolitan great-grandmother."

But the wonderful tale here related would be too long to repeat, and spoilt in the repeating. Besides, I have already taken up too much of your time with things in which Louis Norbert, alas! plays no apparent part.

And—well—my hypothesis is not yet ripe enough to formulate!

I am, dear Lady Venetia,
Yours, etc.

LETTER XXIII

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington: July 20, 1909

MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

How awfully interesting about your delightful friends, and the villa and your discovery (I can't quite make out *what* you discovered) about Artemisia and the crypts—no, I won't try for the word, you yourself said "*ne pas confondre* with mushrooms——"

The fact is I have only had time to glance at your letter—for I have just found another from Louis Norbert! And what is far more exciting even—whom do you suppose he

introduces into the scene? Guess! Try and guess! But you can't, although it is so simple! Why, who could it be except *the Villain*, the ABBÉ MANFREDINI!

I shall begin to believe that I have the second sight, as my silly Scotch cousins imagine themselves to have! For didn't I see, at the very first glance (I mean at the epitaph), that it *was the Abbé Manfredini who had done it?* It's *too* strange, and at the same time too utterly obvious, when you think of it. But now behold the Abbé in person!

Your (rather excited) friend, etc.

PS.—*Please acknowledge by return of post.* I must know what you think of it all.

PS. II.—Was *this* perhaps your hypothesis you couldn't formulate at once? But after all, haven't we known it from the very first time we clapped eyes on the epitaph?

LETTER XXIV

Louis Norbert to Sir Anthony Thesiger, Bart.

Rome: Jan. 16, 1684 N.S.

MY GOOD MASTER AND BELOVED BROTHER,

I am, as you see, still in Rome, and like to remain as long at least as his Lordship, returning with him after a sojourn at Naples. And this partly to make all possible and diligent profit by a teacher whom good luck hath sent me, being such that no man is better able to explain all the wonders and curiosities of this place, illustrating them with polite learning, he being indeed the deepest antiquarian virtuoso, besides profoundest historian and scholar, I have met. This is a certain Abbot Manfredini, a native of Pisa, whom I knew at a sitting of the famous Academy of the Lynxes, at a discussion of the physical inventions of the celebrated Torricelli.

Lest your lady mother and my good benefactress, whom I devoutly reverence, should take alarm at this popish frequentation, let me set forth how *Abbas* is the title given in this country to any ecclesiastic, or indeed any layman, lawyer, or scholar, however little a clerk in orders, who hangeth about the Papal Court and wears the collar and black cloak for cheapness and protection.

As regards Manfredini, although (by some popish simony) he benefiteth by the title and stipend of canon of Pisa, he is but such a half-baked priest, averring moreover only kneaded of pagan dough with the devil's own leaven. Indeed, his freedom from any superstition, even if it savoureth at times of the doctrines of Epicurus, obligeth him to a shallow pretence of conversion, whereof himself is the first to laugh, in order to consort uncensured with heretics, with whom, as with all strangers of distinction, he mixes greatly, being well travelled, versed in all modern tongues, and a favourite of the French Court in especial, whose legal adviser he purporteth to be in matters ecclesiastic, though better able to

advise, I suspect, in the purchase of gems and statues, whereof himself possesses a rare collection. From our first time of meeting he hath shown me a degree of friendship marvellous towards such a tyro in learning as I feel myself, and hath lost no occasion of obliging me even beyond all my wishes. Wherefore I am his grateful debtor and most attached friend, he being moreover of infinite sweetness and courtesy and a modesty rare in the learned, so that my attachment suffereth only from a certain irreligious ribaldry and gross levity, which, however, he showeth towards others in my presence but never towards myself, excusing himself by the need of *barking with the wolves* and also by the hatred of hypocrisy bred by Rome in a quick, free spirit. By his kindness I have had all curiosities thrown open to me, and been given an opportunity of seeing many famous persons, wherein Rome, as always, abounds.

By him, *exempli gratia*, have I been presented to the learned Court of the Queen of Sweden, who liveth here in voluntary exile, a crazy, foul-mouthed old harridan

enough, but versed in every science and of curious mother-wit.

And yesterday I was carried by him to view the library of Prince Columna, on which occasion I was introduced to another personage who, albeit not a queen, might have become one. The story told me by the Abbot Manfredini is singular and little known, so I deem it deserving your attention. It seems the present King of France, in his minority, loved a niece of the famous Cardinal Mazarino, at that time Minister of France; and would have wedded her after long wooing, but for the opposition of the Queen, his mother. This Mazarine lady was accordingly married by proxy to Prince Columna, Constable of Naples, and the chief, with his rival Orsini, of all the Roman barons. But whether disdainning such meaner alliance, or fearing his jealousy, since she ceased not flaunting her passion for the French King, she, having borne him sundry children, fled from Rome, and habited like a man, took ship to France where, after all manner of strange adventures, she sought an interview with the King, her

former sweetheart. Which, being refused, and herself threatened with return to her jealous husband, she wandered for many years from Court to Court, sometimes setting all by the ears through her favours, but oftener confined in convents and fortresses, and obliged to hairbreadth escapes and penurious voyages, wherein she was assisted by the fidelity of a Moorish slave-wench ; and always flouting her enemies, by her invincible daring and the magic she exercised over men's minds, whereunto the vulgar add the knowledge of astrology and necromancy, she being now sister to two French duchesses arraigned for meddling in such unlawful knowledge at the time of the notorious Marchioness of Brinvilliers and La Voisin, poisoners and sorceresses.

The lady I am telling of, whose right name is Maria Mancini, Constablers Columna and Duchess of Tagliacotio, is now a widow and lives very retired though in great state, wearing it is said, day and night, the necklace of pearls given her by King Louis, in whom, 'tis thought, she never despairs of reviving his old

flame ; moreover spending much time in the vain practices of astrology and sortilege, doubtless in hopes of gaining through them such access to the King as himself hath constantly denied her. It is this lady's story which the famous Monsieur Racine hath set forth in his play of "Berenice," wherein that Jewish Queen, beloved of Titus, when that Emperor, respectful of the majesty of Rome, repudiates his youthful promise to wed her, is made to use the words with which this lady is said to have reproached her royal lover—" You are a king, sir, yet while you weep, allow me to go hence."

As we were examining the precious manuscripts collected by a late Cardinal Columna (whereof I enclose you an inventory hastily made by myself) who should enter the library but the Lady Constableness, attended by two maids-in-waiting, a chaplain, and an old Moorish female, marvellous ill-favoured.

Abbot Manfredini instantly made three deep reverences, and falling on one knee, offered to kiss her hand as of a queen, exclaiming, in his irreverent fashion :

“Salve Regina !”

Whereat she, scanning him disdainfully, turned to that old Moorish woman saying :

“See, see whom we have here ! by my faith the learnedst man in Rome, most agreeable of spies and delicate of blackmailers, acceptable above every other eaves-dropper to the polished Court of Versailles.

“Well, Abbot,” she continues, laughing and signing him to rise up, “well, when will you be given the Collar of the Holy Spirit ? or will it be the collar (as these Italians call it, Strozzi) of the garotting block offered you by His Holiness himself in recognition of the many enemies whom you have killed ?”

Whereon she waved her hand in mock salute, and made to leave the room.

But the Abbot took her words as jest, and throwing himself in her way, vowed he was ready to put his head in any noose to please so lovely a lady, but would rather it might be the two white hands of one of her handsome serving wenches.

“And, madam,” he adds, pushing me before him, “vouchsafe a glance of those Jove-

conquering eyes to this sweet youth, English, or as St. Augustine said, Angelical, in form and breeding, yet, 'tis said, French of birth, that he may tell it to his nephews when an aged man."

I confess these pleasantries had much embarrassed me, and more so when I found myself laughingly thrust by the Abbot into the Princess's presence and almost on to my knees.

"English and yet French!" cries the Constableness, stopping on her way to the door. "What entertaining riddle, fit for the *ruelle* of *precious* ladies, may this be, Monsieur l'Abbé? or has your elegant wit invented some sham mystery lacking a real one to offer your royal employers?"

But while she spoke, half jesting, half angry, she fixed her eyes on me with an odd intention, and as she did so I noticed the Abbé watching us anxiously.

I bethought me of the lady's reputed madness, and was heartily glad when she departed and this strange comedy, yet flavoured with somewhat tragic, had come to an end.

When we were alone the Abbé, no doubt to reassure me, jested not a little about the impression I had made on the Constableness, calling me Louis XIV.'s successor, till I bade him cease such pleasantries unseemly to his cloth, whereon he told me very seriously beware of this lady, she being the maddest woman in all Rome, albeit Rome holds the Queen of Sweden.

And anon told me the story I have just related to you, to which I would add that the Constableness Columna is still well-favoured and of majestic mien, and has a certain magic of eye and voice which explaineth the fear the King of France is still said to feel of her ever returning to his presence.

I would not have you judge the Abbot Manfredini by this anecdote; he being, indeed, of those whose only fault is jesting affectation of the vices they have not, and taking ironic amusement (as being a declared misanthropos or disbeliever in men) in the foolish gossip whereby the wicked folly of the city explaineth the great fortune and influence due only to his unparalleled learning and universal

helpfulness, making him beloved of all the great and hated by all the mean and envious.

LETTER XXV

From the Archæologist to Lady Venetia

Florence: July 26, 1909

DEAR LADY VENETIA,

Your letter containing copy of Louis Norbert's has followed me here, and I answer it at once, excited, as you can imagine, by this *entrée en scène* of the learned and villainous Abbé.

But, dear Lady Venetia, I am more excited even at another detail, which you seem almost to have overlooked—the simultaneous appearance of the Constableness Colonna. Do you forget that you yourself have ingeniously identified this lady with the mysterious *Berenice* of my Pisan spies?

You do indeed take your historical discoveries lightly ; why, one of us would hope for a professorship for less !

The matter strikes me perhaps because, taking the opportunity of these few days in Florence to rummage in the Grand Ducal archives, I have found those reports from the usual Grand Ducal spies, and among them more allusions both to the Abbé and the mysterious *Berenice*, who is never mentioned without the title of this *madwoman*. One of these allusions, in a letter from a Fra Barnaba, Servite, is as follows :

“ The Abbate you know of excuses himself, saying he is busy preventing that madwoman embroiling His Highness in her crazy ambitions, which, after continuing a good twenty years with ceaseless displeasure to the Court of France, and worry to those of Spain and Savoy and all persons who have come across her path, have, it seems, got a new lease of life from the rumours that the Ace of Hearts is now abroad in Italy.”

I am returning to Pisa to-morrow, and soon after to the villa of Marchese Viscardi, where I

hope to hatch the hypothesis I have alluded to, unless indeed, as I half expect, you and Louis Norbert himself will have forestalled me in the discovery.

I am, dear Lady Venetia,
Yours, etc.

LETTER XXVI

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington : Aug. 1, 1909

MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

I now know who Louis Norbert de Caritan really was. And I believe you know it also, but you have wanted to leave me the joy, the *intoxication* of lighting upon the discovery, you dear, kind young friend.

That was what you meant when you made me so cross refusing to "formulate a theory" (what a pedant I did think you!) and went on in that maddening way insisting I should invent! Well! I have not invented, unless

inventing may mean (by the way, you hinted something to this effect)—may mean *discovering the truth*.

And the TRUTH—the truth you also know, I feel sure, my dear Professor, the truth is—that L. N. was the heir to the throne of France, inasmuch as the legitimate son of Louis XIV. and Marie Mancini. It flashed across me this morning a good hour after reading your last letter, and in the strangest way. I was feeling ungrateful and annoyed at your still refusing to tell me what you and your young friend have discovered in the Abbess's letters (now I know!) when my eye fell on that book about the Mancini niece which you had sent me. It had got unbound, as French books do, and Arthington had spelled slowly through it, dog's-earring as he does; so it looked untidy because *I* was cross with you. (I hate books that fall to pieces, worse than roses messing a carpet almost.) I rang for my maid to put it in a parcel which was going to the binders—really merely to get rid of it because *you* had not been kind, I thought, and meanwhile picked it up and opened it at random.

I fell upon the description of that little seaport Brouage where Marie spent an autumn in enforced or voluntary exile after that last passionate interview with the King at St. Jean D'Angely, and made up her mind, or, as the writer thinks, pretended to, to give him up for ever.

I had thought it rather twaddle (the usual French *psychologie de son prochain*, as Bourget used to call common or garden gossip years ago), when suddenly now I had a sort of vision of Brouage (by the way, Arthington had sent for Perrey's big book "Le Roman du Grand Roi," and I'd looked it over and there is all about Brouage in that); well, I had a vision, *quite* distinct: a tiny dismantled fortress, all grown with wild fig and caper, above the half-silted harbour and the dreary, dreary salt marshes; underneath the castle was the town or village, low houses, white-washed but all weather-stained, and a rampart with pollard elms separating the one from the other; and the sea far away at the end of that half-choked canal, with distant capes and towns, I think one must have been La

Rochelle—gleaming fitfully like liberty and happiness.

I assure you I saw the place *as if I were in it*. A coach drawn by six grey mules—I suppose they used them in the South of France—drove slowly round and round the bastions, with the brown toasted elm leaves raining down on it. In the coach was that governess of the Mazarin nieces, that Mme. de Venel, who played the spy for Mazarin and told him whenever his niece got a packet from the young King ; also two girls, one almost a child (that was the funny, pert little Marianne, the one who afterwards told the judge in the witch trial that she had seen the devil in his figure), and one very lovely and silly—that was Hortense, the one who was at Charles II.'s Court. But Marie Mancini, the King's would-be bride, was not with them. Then I saw inside of the chateau or fortress, the great grim rooms with tall chairs marshalled against the walls, and card tables with wax flambeaux guttering in the draught, and these same two sisters and two friends they had sent for to play with. Then a room looking

towards the sea, a salt wind blowing in among the curtains of the bed like a hearse—Marie was in it, insensible, like dead. There was an old Arab (do you remember she took lessons in astrology at Brouage, from an Arab physician whom Mazarin grumbled about ?) with a white beard and turban sitting near the bed calculating a horoscope, and a tiny Moorish slave girl hiding behind a curtain. And bending over the pillow was that governess or duenna, Mme. de Venel, all in black and yellow with a high, starched cap like the *femmes savantes* wear. The woman in the bed suddenly moaned and turned over on to her side away from these people. Then the Arab quickly got up, and lifting the counterpane took something from her side, covering it with his sleeve, and the duenna fetched a wrapper from a chest, and took the thing in it from him. A man in grey, with big boots, was in the door, and Mme. de Venel handed the wrapped-up thing to him ; and as he took it, it screamed dreadfully, and was a new-born child. Then the woman in the bed suddenly sat up like galvanised and stared as

if she didn't see, and then shrieked and shrieked and twisted her hands until she began to sob and fell back exhausted—and then I saw nothing more. For, mind you, I *did* really seem to see it much as crystal-gazers say they do.

But at the same time I knew I was *thinking* it all, not really seeing, and I heard myself say to myself, "Of course, that's how it all happened," and noticed that the book had fallen and that my maid was there waiting for orders, so I said, like an idiot, "Oh, Banks, I wanted you to send this book with the others to the binders, and after I'd rung it suddenly struck me I'd like to read it again. I'm so sorry to have troubled you—and would you bring me my garden hat and the scissors." I felt such a fool when she answered, "Quite so, my lady," as if that was the way sane people usually behaved or looked, for I'm sure *I* must have been staring into space like a lunatic. And I just longed to tell her all about Louis Norbert; and if it had been my dear little French Anna, who got married last year, I should like a shot, and she would have

understood and been very sympathetic. But English servants are a sort of *memento not mori*, but *memento* whatever is Latin for *not making a fool of oneself*, don't you think? I was horribly agitated and felt I must rush out into the open. I thought I'd walk to Harlow Heath, where there's air and space, but I found myself walking up and down, up and down the old bowling green in the lee of the house, stopping to stare like an idiot at the old stone bowls, or cannon-balls from the Royalist siege, and mumbling silly words to myself. And suddenly a tune came into my head. It was one of those seventeenth century things, the lament of Jephthah's daughter by Carissimi, with a long minor *rifioritura* on the word *ululate*. And I said to myself: "Yes—of course—Jephthah's daughter and Louis XIV.'s son!" There was a high wind, and the old trees (they are pines almost like old, old cedars) creaked and moaned and seemed to repeat *ululate*. I suppose I was really a bit off my head.

Since then I have been absurdly calm, as if it had happened years ago, I mean the

discovery of who Louis Norbert was, and as if I had always known it. And of course I always *ought to have* known it (as I suppose you did, but why not tell me?) all the time. For it is so simple and so obvious how it all happened. I know every detail. But before telling you, with your dreadful historical mind, I will have a go at those books again (I believe Arthington hasn't sent them back yet to the London library) and work it all out, dates and all.

No, on second thoughts I won't delay sending this off and telling you merely that I now know it all (as I feel more and more sure *you* did all along!)—I mean that Louis Norbert was the legitimate son of Louis XIV. and Marie Mancini.

And so good-bye for to-day.

Yours, etc.

LETTER XXVII

From the Archæologist to Lady Venetia

Pisa : Aug. 4, 1909

DEAR LADY VENETIA,

I have read your letter twice over and feel positively stunned ; what a poet and a novelist you are !

Know it all along ? I ? that Louis Norbert was what you say ? The thing is so colossal my pedant's pen scarcely dares copy it ! *Never* did such an idea enter my brain.

The evidence in the Abbess's secret correspondence, even if it refer to Louis Norbert *at all* (which is my *half-fledged* hypothesis), has absolutely nothing to do with Louis Norbert's *birth ; if anything* (for I am not sure) with Louis Norbert's *death*. I sent you the Arvède Barine book merely because I thought you would be pleased to have identified the

Berenice of my Pisan spies with Mazarin's niece ; I believe you have utterly forgotten that real first-rate bit of guess work on your own part ! As to your present theory, I fear that had it ever entered my mind I should have felt bound to dismiss it in the light of the documents published by Lucien Perrey and which I have consulted since getting your letter this morning. If that book (" *Le Roman du Grand Roi*," also another, "*Une Princesse Romaine*," which you should get) is still at Arthington, as you thought, you will doubtless have convinced yourself that your delightful notion does not, alas ! hold historical water. This book contains the complete series of letters from Mme. de Venel, the duenna, informing the Cardinal uncle, almost day by day, of the health and doings of the Mancini girls. And these reports leave absolutely no room for such a supposition as yours. Moreover, there are letters of Cardinal Mazarin (see Perrey) to the Queen Mother, and one at least to Louis XIV. himself, expressing the utmost reprobation of any such possible marriage. Of course, as Arvède Barine, I think, points

out, Marie Mancini's letter from Brouage to her uncle, saying that she gives up all hope of the royal marriage, may have been a mere feint on her part, since she continued in correspondence with the King. But that does not alter the evidence of Mazarin's spy, the *duenna de Venel*. Besides, if the child had been born in wedlock, even if it had been spirited away as you describe, do you suppose Marie Mancini would ever for a moment have given up the King and let herself be married off to Prince Colonna? We know that even after she had been married for years to the Constable, she never gave up the hope of seeing Louis XIV.; and it seems very probable that her flight from Rome was less due to her alleged fear of the Constable's jealousy (he had closed an eye to very violent flirtations with Cardinal Chigi and the Chevalier de Lorraine) than to a hope of forcing her way into the King's presence.

Would not such a woman have moved heaven and earth if she had actually had a legitimate child as a trump card? But of all this you are doubtless thoroughly convinced

by this time. Do not let it diminish in your eyes (it could never in mine) the value of your wonderful vision of the castle by the sea, of the sick room and the spiriting away of a new-born child. My contention is that it does not refer to a child of Marie Mancini and Louis XIV. But why should it not refer to Louis Norbert? You are, no doubt, less of a disbeliever in occultism than you boast yourself. And what, given such belief, could be more natural or rather supernatural than that your strange sympathy with the poor youth who died in 1684 should enable you to see into his past, however hidden from ordinary investigation? After all, it is only what would have happened to a poet or novelist; and, as I have already ventured to say, a poet and a novelist are lost (or perhaps gained!) in you, dear Lady Venetia; only I, a poor plodding historian, am bound to protest, in the name of historical documents, against the gratuitous interpretation of your vision of Louis Norbert's birth in the light of a marriage between Louis XIV. and the Berenice of our Pisan spies. Who knows whether

your Muniment Room, methodically examined, may not at last prove that both of us are right! Meanwhile pray bear up with the scientific cavillings of your fervently appreciative though sceptical pedant, etc.

XXVIII

*Telegram from Lady Venetia to the
Archæologist*

Arthington: Aug. 7, 1909

Objections already disposed of in a letter you will receive to-morrow. Governess utterly untrustworthy. Uncle really delighted.

VENETIA HAMMOND.

LETTER XXIX

(Crossed letter XXV)

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington: August 4, 1909

MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

It has taken me longer to work out

than I thought—I mean all the dates and things in Lucien Perrey's book and also Amedée René's "Les Nièces de Mazarin," which my brother *most* luckily sent for after reading your Arvède Barine. But I don't grudge the hours I spent over those dull, dull books, because it all works out quite *marvellously*, as you will see, leaving absolutely *no* doubt that first: Louis XIV. married Marie Mancini secretly in Dec. 1658 or Jan. 1659; second, that a child of this marriage was born at Brouage, near La Rochelle, in autumn 1659; third, that this child was spirited away instantly after its birth by Cardinal Mazarin's agents, the mother being deceived into the belief that it had never lived; and fourth, of course, that this child, whom my ancestor Nicholas Thesiger, formerly Cromwell's envoy to Mazarin, took charge of and educated, unconscious of his real parentage, was the person afterwards known as Louis Norbert de Caritan, who died at Pisa in 1684, presumably poisoned by the Abbé Manfredini. See how businesslike I have become! Isn't that how you historians do when you (what

you refused so long *et pour cause!*) *formulate a hypothesis*. Only, of course, this isn't a hypothesis. It's *fact*. And this is how it all came about.

You remember that the Queen Mother and Mazarin wanted the proposed marriage of Louis XIV. with a Princess of Savoy to miscarry—the Queen because she hoped for a Spanish marriage which would make peace with her brother, and Mazarin—well, of course Mazarin hadn't made up his mind whether it wouldn't be quite possible for Louis XIV. to marry his niece, since he had been so long in love with her and since two other nieces had meanwhile married royalties of sorts. Mazarin wasn't sure how the Queen Mother would take the *fait accompli* of such a marriage; you remember the old fox once asked her, pretending to joke, how she would like Marie Mancini for a daughter-in-law, and Mme. de Motteville, who was present, writes that the Queen answered very hotly that if such a thing happened all France would rebel against her son and she herself would head the rebels; whereupon Mazarin drew in his horns

and pretended to snuff out all that romance and work for the boring Spanish marriage. Anyhow, at the time we're dealing with (I've looked up all the dates, it was in 1658) there was still this Savoy marriage on the tapis, which had to be offered to the King for one reason or another (and my belief is that Mazarin just used it to push Louis into his niece's arms, as actually happened)—had to be offered to the young King. But in order to make this match miscarry Mazarin suggested to the stupid old Queen (fancy her having married that vile half-priest herself, faugh!) that Marie Mancini should be employed, she having been brought up as the King's play-fellow and already having made red-hot love to him for about a year, taking her as one of the party to meet the poor little Savoy girl with whom these old schemers had determined to disgust Louis XIV. So they all went to Lyons. Do you remember that the Queen Mother and the other Mazarin nieces travelled in coaches (the journey was a royal progress and took weeks), but Marie Mancini insisted on riding the whole way on horseback by the

King's side, through mud and frost and rain from Paris to Dijon and from Dijon to Lyons? At Lyons the King went out to meet the Savoys coming to be looked at, and, like the poor, mean-spirited creature he was, seemed quite resigned to marrying the princess. But as soon as he was home Marie Mancini made him a fearful scene, saying among other polite little things, "How can you allow them to give you in marriage *à une si laide femme?*"—whereupon that feeble, pompous young egotist ("he has a leg," like Meredith's Sir Willoughby Patterne) began to be horribly rude to the Savoys and let the Duchess know, in the brutalest way, that he did not fancy her daughter. Then the poor Savoys were given emerald earrings or something and sent back across the Alps, like housemaids who don't suit. The vulgarity of those old people is too sickening!

The Queen Mother began machinating the Spanish marriage she wanted, and Mazarin pretended to aid and abet her. But how well he aided her is shown by the Court remaining two whole months at Lyons, which two

months were entirely taken up in fêtes given by Louis XIV. to his ex-playfellows the Mazarin nieces, and particularly in walks, card-playing, endless novel-reading and so forth, *tête-à-tête* with Marie Mancini. There were even some rather charming little youthful idyls, if you remember, like that of the King drawing his sword and throwing it away because Marie had hit against it as they walked side by side; also the King (fancy the afterwards peruked Cæsar on the rocking-horse in—is it Place Royale?) getting on to the box of the Mazarin nieces' coach and driving them home evening after evening with his royal hands. These young people were always in and out of the Queen's residence and the Mazarin lodgings, and one has an impression of Place Bellecour and Lyons in general having no other inhabitants and being utterly given over to their amusements and flirtations. That was in December 1658 and January 1659. Well, *during those two months at Lyons* Louis XIV. *secretly married Marie Mancini*. Whether he did it freely from sheer mad love, or to assert himself

against his mother and her Spanish match, or whether Marie, who was always ready with scenes on the smallest occasion (what a mad, headstrong, violent creature she was!), bullied him into it, of course we don't know. Nor whether the Cardinal uncle closed an eye or actually abetted, intending to recognise or disavow the marriage according to what turned up in the meanwhile—all this we don't know. But this is certain, *married they were*. No one says so, but it must have happened; a young gentleman of Louis XIV.'s later gallantries doesn't go on philandering two whole years round a passionate young siren without making her either his mistress or his wife. But a creature as ambitious, as bent on a royal marriage, as astonishingly able to command herself, a niece, in fact, of Mazarin, is not La Vallière, who makes an end of all her ambitions with an "all for love." And remark, not a creature has even suggested that Marie was Louis XIV.'s mistress. It is always of marriage, a promise of marriage that old Mazarin affects to be afraid, and instead of his and the Queen Mother's pushing the

young people into an illicit connection and have done with it, these two old sinners are always interfering with meetings and correspondence on the score of possible marriage. Well; once safely married to Marie, Louis XIV. pretends to agree to the Spanish match; Mazarin goes off to negotiate the peace of the Pyrenees. He orders his unmarried nieces away from Paris, sends them to La Rochelle—(La Rochelle, which is Louis Norbert's reputed birth-place!)—and when Louis XIV. has insisted on meeting Marie Mancini at St. Jean d'Angely, she is packed off with her duenna and younger sisters to Brouage (and why to Brouage, a tiny little God-forsaken fortress, *but on the sea*, except because a place was wanted where a child could be secretly born and secretly spirited away?). At Brouage, after two months' pressure put upon her, Marie Mancini at last writes that famous letter to the Cardinal promising to give up all thoughts of the King—despite which letter the King keeps on, spies or no spies, sending her immense letters and even (you remember?) a puppy of his favourite dog, and he finds

excuse for delaying the promised marriage. Then freed from Brouage Marie is reported to be flirting with the Duke of Lorraine; immediately Louis XIV.'s (Sir Willoughby Patterne) vanity is incensed; he marries his Spaniard forthwith, and Mazarin having meanwhile unexpectedly died, Marie is sent off in great state as the wife by proxy of the Constable Colonna. And it is then she says, "*Vous êtes Roi, sire; et vous pleurez, et me laissez partir.*"

That's the story. Of that secret marriage, which must have taken place (Mazarin doubtless conniving) at Lyons in December 1658 or January 1659, a child was born next autumn, in the secrecy of the exile at Brouage. *And that child was Louis Norbert.* Mazarin had him taken from his mother instantly on his birth, sent to the neighbouring La Rochelle (once the stronghold of Protestantism, whence the notion that he was a southern Protestant), and then conveyed to my ancestor's in England. Marie, who was dangerously ill, was told by the duenna and the Arab doctor that her child was either still-born or had died

at birth ; she was delirious for days and knew nothing of it all. Of course Mazarin might have had the child killed ; it would have been simpler, and people were so fond of murdering in those days. But you must remember that at the moment of its birth Louis XIV. had not yet married his Spaniard and was on the contrary perpetually putting off the ceremony. So of course Mazarin preferred keeping the child as a card up his sleeve to take the Queen Mother's trick with, I mean oblige her to recognise the Mancini marriage when the right moment came. And of course Mazarin, in his daily letters to the Queen Mother (horrible old woman ! fancy a King of France's widow becoming the morgantic of that oily clerical adventurer, and going on writing him cypher love letters when they were both of them well over sixty !)—well, of course, in those fulsome letters to the Queen, Mazarin kept assuring her that he was working his head off (always whining about his gout and his services to France, the old villain !) trying to come to an agreement with the Spanish Court. But in reality he was

doing all he could to make that Spanish match miscarry. Otherwise, I ask you, why should it have taken him all those months at St. Jean de Luz to settle it all up? The gullibility of those great political personages (let alone the people who write about them nowadays!) is really something portentous, when a duffer like me sees at a glance through all this rot. Of course it's only fair to say that the Queen Mother didn't know there was such a person as Louis Norbert, not having been brought up at Arthington or seen the epitaph at Pisa or the letters in our Muniment Room as I have. Still, allowing that much, these seventeenth-century intriguers weren't worth their salt, were they? never putting two and two together.

As to these modern historians, Barine, and Perrey and Amedée René, and the rest of them! Well, *you* aren't a historian, are you, only an archæologist, which is so much more sensible, so you don't mind my letting fly at these people. I suppose these *historians* would say that none of all this can have happened, because of the letters they have

discovered in the National Library or the Affaires Etrangères, or wherever it is; letters, particularly those of the duenna de Venel to Mazarin, purporting to give the minutest account of Marie Mancini's health and doings while at Brouage, and leaving not the smallest chink, so to speak, by which to introduce the baby; nothing but assurances that Marie was being well *surveillée* and that everything was being done (though in vain!) to intercept any correspondence. How is it that these historical bigwigs don't see *at a glance* that the letters they are publishing are a *sham*? Really, it's too droll to imagine Mazarin, who, after all, *was* a great diplomatist and had contrived to become Prime Minister andmorganatic husband or lover to a Queen although his father kept a hat-shop—it's too much of a good thing to imagine that Mazarin would have kept letters telling all about the marriage of his niece with Louis XIV. and the birth of Louis Norbert! Why, of course these printed letters are faked-up reports written by the duenna according to Mazarin's instructions, in order to be sent to the Queen

and make her believe that he was taking every precaution against the King and his own niece, and the *real* reports of the duenna were all in cypher (I've learned that much from you!), and such horrible compromising things (that my common sense suffices to tell!) Mazarin instantly put into the fire, so that these silly blinds have remained. Why, if the Queen Mother had found them she'd have off with his head'ed at once, surely?

Well, I am too tired to write any more to-day—and surely *this is enough!*

Your historically-minded friend, etc.

LETTER XXX

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington : August 7, 1909

MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

I have just sent you a wire telling you that all your objections were forestalled in the letter I sent off *before* getting yours.

Well, I suppose scientific people *have* to cultivate scepticism at any price and at any cost ; there is doubtless (isn't that how you reason ?) some advantage to the race which compensates for the individual silliness. But I must say I expected something better from you, my dear Professor. But there it just is, and all men, historians or not historians, are *exactly* alike in this—once you get a wrong notion into your head at the beginning, no power on earth will ever get it out again or prevent your seeing the most *obvious* fact distorted through it ! I mean that you having, long ago, heard me talk about some imaginary friends and make up foolish stories and dialogues about them (as every human being except historians and my dull ambassador cousin naturally does)—well, having chanced to hear me talk about Hermann and Isabella and the double-bass player and Italo, you have written me down as a foolish woman with a hopeless tendency to romancing about everything, what you call a *born poet or novelist*. Almost the most riling part of it is this amiable attempt (so like

a man towards a woman!) to turn an *unjustifiable accusation* into a compliment—of course that all hangs together with your recommending me to *invent*. (I was perfectly right in being angry with you, although you afterwards explained it away.) And now you think I *am* inventing, I suppose. And all the time it is *you*, my poor young, learned friend, who have been inventing, *inventing a me* utterly unlike the reality. It is really pitiable.

Well, I hope my letter has put an end to that invention, *yours*, I mean, by showing that I am serious in this matter, whatever *you* may be!

As my telegram told you, I had already forestalled your objections, or rather the *facts* and *dates* themselves have disposed of them. As to further objections of yours, viz., that *Marie Mancini would never have let herself be married to the Colonna man, in fact would never have let go of the King if there had been a child*, why, my dear man, the *whole point is that she didn't know that a child existed*, because Mme. de Venel and the astrologer and the rest

of them stole it during her delirium and then made her believe either that it had been born dead or had died immediately after birth. Indeed, that was why she wrote from Brouage to her uncle giving up all further thoughts of the King. That letter was the result of her terrible disappointment and grief at the loss of the child, and her recognising she now no longer had any hold on that selfish young brute of a King. *That letter of renunciation was perfectly genuine* on Marie Mancini's part, and it's really rather amusing that just *it* should have been selected as a hoax by the historians (particularly that Arvède Barine, who is besides a woman, and therefore malignant towards other women!) who took the de Venel duenna's bogus reports as so much gospel. "*Et voilà comment s'écrit l'histoire!*"—Who was it said that? Certainly not a historian!

PS.—I have been thinking more about the point whether M. M. *ever* got to know that her child by Louis XIV. had survived; and I've had another look at the facts given by those books. Of course I suppose "historians,"

at least *these* historians (for I know *great* historians like Michelet and Carlyle, and like you're going to be some day) aren't tied by bogus documents—I suppose they'd *point out* (that's the form, isn't it?) that there is absolutely *no* mention either of a marriage or a child in the memoirs which Marie M. herself published. But then these memoirs were published during her lifetime, and, *what is more important*, while she still entertained hopes of getting permission to return to France; they would therefore not contain anything that could compromise or incense the King; just as (even these "historians" point this out) she carefully refrained from saying anything in them against her husband, whom she was afraid of, although in her private letters she made no bones about explaining her flight from him by the fear of Colonna trying to kill her. And now I come to think of it, all those fears of Colonna killing her were probably a mere excuse she gave her friends for trying to get back to France and a way of awakening Louis XIV.'s sympathy (which she didn't)—for if Colonna had been

so jealous as all that he'd not have tolerated all her goings-on in Rome with the Chevalier de Lorraine (all those rowdy swimming parties in the Tiber—rather amusing they must have been, at the *Acqua Acetosa*, I suppose, but not decent at *her* age), and that Cardinal Chigi, with the bulgy eyes ; besides, Colonna had his Mme. Paleotti, and they all evidently lived quite shamelessly and peacefully together. All that fear of Colonna's tardy bloodthirstiness was therefore evidently mere shamming, and this leads us to a very important conclusion. Don't you think that M. M.'s extraordinary flight from Rome (you remember how she and her sister Hortense drove to Civita Vecchia—or was it Fiumicino?—after audibly giving the order “to Frascati,” and put on men's clothes in the carriage, and then wandered about, half dead from fatigue and fright, on the seashore, waiting for the faithful butler to bring a boat round ; and then the meeting of the boat ruffians—I was once on the Tiber with two totally drunken boatmen and had to take an oar, so I know what it feels like—and the

blackmailing and the escape from Barbary pirates)—well, don't you think it probable that M. M. decided on this extraordinary escapade because she had somehow got wind of the survival of her child by Louis XIV.? That would also account for her change of attitude towards Colonna (you are a man of science, so one can talk freely with you like a doctor), whom after all she had rather liked by her own showing, and which she explained by an astrologer warning her that if she had a fourth child she'd die in the process. For, of course, if a woman discovers that she is the mother of the King of France's legitimate successor, she does not want any more little Colonnas, even if she did like the Colonna man. It may have been that little Moorish slave girl who told her, the one who had been given to her in her girlhood and was always so faithful afterwards, *and who accompanied her on her flight*. You see, the little Moor may have seen the astrologer and Mme. de Venel do something queer which she understood only later when she herself was grown up. It's all very possible. But mind, I do not

for an instant insist that it must have happened.

Marie Mancini may *never to the end of her days have suspected her child's survival*, just as Louis Norbert may never, to the end of his life, have suspected (let alone that this was why the Abbé poisoned him) that he had a father and mother alive, still less who they were. And Sir Nicholas' widow and son, that rather intolerable Anthony, may never have dreamed who their "young Frenchman" was nor troubled their heads about it. People take things so extraordinarily for granted when they're in their own family, don't you think? And we Thesigers have never been noted for the nimbleness of our wits nor exuberance of our fancy, although you *do* think that *I* am a "born novelist and poet"—or whatever your polite phrase is!

By the way, this letter, and the way in which I have summed up all the evidence to you (*and my complete open-mindedness as to whether or not either M. M. or L. N. ever suspected their relationship*) must have convinced you that I am of the genuine stock of Sir Peter

Thesiger, Elizabeth's Privy Councillor, of whom it was said, "that he was a man of weighty judgment, albeit slow in the forming it."

Yours, etc.

PS.—Do write at once. What a lot of misunderstanding and waste of time merely because you're in Italy and I in England!

LETTER XXXI

(Never sent)

From the Archæologist to Lady Venetia

Pisa : August 12, 1909

But, dear Lady Venetia, don't you see that what you call *consulting the facts* is merely referring the whole matter to your own fervid fancy, interpreting everything in the light of the little romance yourself has made up, and sweeping aside as "bogus" whatever evidence goes against your own wishes . . . ?

There is a volume of William James's essays called "The Will to Believe"—you are that Will in this case. Or—are you merely playing at Hermann and Isabella after all? It is a rule of that game to pretend that you aren't, and is it my silly pedantry and lack of worldly experience which makes me fail to play up to you? I feel so utterly lost, such a hopeless, owlsh, priggish duffer. If only I knew what you were about, whether in earnest or not, or both, but anything for certain, so as not to be making perpetual wrong moves if it is a game, or hurting your feelings genuinely if it isn't one. For, prig though I am, I also could "invent." I am afraid to think how well I could invent, forge documents and all! if once I set about it, merely to please you, or rather to keep up this enchanting romance, which is worth all the Louis Norberts and Artemisias of all the seventeenth century.

But then you may be in earnest. In fact, I am sure you *are* in earnest and that it is merely my priggishness which sees your ways as a game; after all, exquisite beings like you do not walk, they *dance*, they do not speak, they

sing, at least compared with the hideous movements and sounds that such as I have recourse to ! And if you *are* in earnest, good heavens ! what an ass, what a bounder would you think me if I ventured to treat the whole matter as a game and attempt to play up to it ! And the worst of it is that the only person who could ever tell me what is really the case is yourself ; and you are the only person I never dare ask.

This letter begun to you has ended off merely as an expression of my own puzzled feelings, but not to you, dear, adorable, unintelligible lady of my thoughts.

One thing at least I can tell you, or rather tell myself : so far, at least, I have never been guilty of deceiving you, nor of prolonging this correspondence which is the romance of my life.

And now for the waste-paper basket !

LETTER XXXII

(Sent instead of preceding)

*From the Archæologist to Lady Venetia**Same date*

DEAR LADY VENETIA,

All that you say is very plausible, splendidly thought out. Almost too plausible, for historical fact usually presents a less tidy appearance.

What remains for you to do is that, having what we call "formulated your hypothesis"—and a most ingenious hypothesis it is—you should patiently work through whatever further documents may still be hidden in your Muniment Room. It is quite possible you may thus acquire absolute certainty for or against. Meanwhile, I will continue my researches here, although they do not seem to bear upon your notion. Still—fancy if

the Abbess's secret correspondence contained even the smallest reference to Louis Norbert !

Yours, etc.

LETTER XXXIII

From the Archæologist to Lady Venetia

Same date

DEAR LADY VENETIA,

Since writing this morning I have come to the conclusion that I must go to England to settle a historical difficulty which blocks my way. I may possibly be going to Cambridge for a day or two. Is it at all possible, in Lord Arthington's present condition, that I should be allowed the honour of calling on you for half an hour ? I think I may be near your part of the world. If it is possible, would it be pushing presumptuousness too far to ask you to send me a wire here to Pisa ? My

departure is not absolutely certain yet, so I cannot give you an English address to answer to, and I should be too sorry to miss an opportunity of presenting you my homage and talking over your discoveries.

At the same time, please believe how perfectly I should understand if Lord Arthington's illness or any other reason made you unable to grant my request.

Yours, etc.

PS.—If I come I will bring you as much of the Abbess's correspondence as we have hitherto deciphered. I wish I could say I was quite sure that it refers to Louis Norbert.

XXXIV

Telegram from Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington : August 16, 1909

Enchanted prospect meeting. Arthington hopes you will spend few days with us. Joint attack on Muniment Room. What fun. *A rivederci presto.*

VENETIA HAMMOND.

INTERLUDE

I

DESPITE a nervous desire for perfect correctness, nay conventionality, of behaviour, the Archæologist contrived to make his visit to Arthington quite disconcertingly unconventional.

As his train approached the station where Lady Venetia had told him he should be fetched, his fervid imagination presented him with a picture of himself arriving in the motor with his luggage, and possibly facing Lady Venetia at the top of the steps (he saw those Jacobean steps with increasingly painful distinctness) while he hesitated whether the right thing was to jump over the side of the car (it was, of course, open in some mysterious way at the back) or wait to be released by some pompous menial. And this picture, nay

drama, became more intolerable with every forward jolt of the slow local train. Moreover he discovered that this meeting, which he had longingly brought about with a duplicity whereat he blushed, had suddenly become a matter of icy indifference verging on positive repulsion. He did not want to see Lady Venetia. Not only not now, but, if possible, never again in all his life. He became aware that he had made her up during the past seven or eight months ; he could have told you how and when he had added each touch to her wholly imaginary image ; he could have recited (indeed did recite to himself) every item in her various letters which now brought home the wilfully disregarded certainty that the reality of this lady was utterly unlike his portrait of her. And with this overwhelming recognition came a feeling that in thus allowing himself to paint an imaginary Lady Venetia, he had taken an unpardonable liberty with the real one, a liberty that the real one, could she guess at anything so monstrous, would resent beyond expression.

For what right had an obscure young pedant, his priggishness fresh from Balliol and a dreadful German university, to think so many times a day, let alone all day long, about a woman (he coldly admitted it) old enough to be his mother, belonging to a totally different caste and set, and whom he had seen during the space of exactly four days? That Lady Venetia Hammond should think of him only as the purveyor or recipient of information (or thereabouts) about a historical personage more or less her own invention—this knowledge, so far from arousing his resentment towards the lady, merely overwhelmed him with the sense of his own ludicrous presumptuousness. For high-flown sentiment alters its fashions like lesser things; and nowadays Don Quixote, so far from openly performing antics in Dulcinea's honour, would, on the contrary, be horrified that his love should be suspected by any creature in the world, and worst of all by Dulcinea herself. Even the lady who never told her love would, so far from pluming herself on her monumental silence, probably have felt intolerably

forward at having any love to be silent about.

Be this as it may, when the Archæologist was within such distance of the appointed station as to begin wondering which side of it Arthington Manor might be situated, he found it quite impossible to face the terrible situation himself had artfully created. So sinking back in the empty compartment, and veiling his countenance in the *Daily News*, he allowed the train to halt without getting out ; and only when it had resumed its slow career, he ventured to look back to where the ticket collector and porter stood opposite a small heap of unclaimed possessions in company with an impassive though inquiring footman. And there, as the train swished round an embankment, there waited the motor from Arthington.

The Archæologist felt an ineffable, cool, trickling relief. But instantly after came the sense that he had made an utter fool of himself and brought about a situation more thorny than the one he had thus childishly evaded. What should he do next ? Allow

the train to carry him to the terminus, Birmingham or Northampton, whatever it were, thence return to London and telegraph some silly excuse? But his luggage would meanwhile have been taken to Arthington. And his whole soul revolted at the thought of Lady Venetia—or through Lady Venetia the Arthington butler—being called upon to restore these articles, which suddenly took on the most ignominiously sordid appearance. Besides, when it came to giving up the whole visit, he discovered that, agonisingly as he dreaded it, to give it up, to return to London and Italy without having seen or heard Lady Venetia, felt exactly like the removal of a limb with preliminary local freezing, only that the limb was somehow his heart.

So at the next station he jumped out desperately; enacted dramatic surprise at his mistake and even horror at separation from his luggage; paid the excess on his ticket and enquired whether he could hire a fly; and, on bare sight of that ignominious vehicle, started off on foot in the direction, as sundry loafers told him, of Arthington Manor. The distance

was seven miles, and he knew that the walk, particularly in the boisterous autumn wind, would steady his utterly disgraceful nerves. Thus he walked, fortunately without the further shamefulness of dust or mud, through the regulation kind of midland landscape, which little by little appeared to him as fantastically poetic and well nigh paradisaic. He became indeed so taken up by the curves of the newly-reaped fields, accentuated by stacks, with the various green bands of market garden and grass, the red brick villages smelling of sweet peas, and the sedgy river reappearing under bridges with whirr of waterfowl, that he really began to look upon his previous nervousness as a bad dream, and to face his meeting with Lady Venetia as the most natural of events, elaborately connecting it with a hope for tea.

II

He was therefore quite steady of nerve, almost too perceptibly steady, when he walked

up the sougning avenue of old twisted pines and towards the terrace, which he recognised so well, where Roman Emperors looked out from circular niches. Then the road swung round where the deer grazed, and there was the entrance to the house. He did not shrink from grasping the bell. He pronounced his own name in unfaltering accents. He manifested no shame at beholding his properties in the hall ; and gave a monosyllabic explanation of the occurrence while being deprived of his hat and stick and asked whether he would like to be shown his room or go in at once. . . .

But at that moment a door was noisily opened, and there, between the Ionic columns of the hall, stood Lady Venetia. He heard her exclamations of pleasure and interrogation without understanding them ; he heard himself answer something which he did not understand either, and saw himself advance towards her as he would have seen a foreign body. And then it was all over. He had never seen this lady before and had never, in all his life, heard her voice. She was Lady

Venetia Hammond, the friend of a friend and about whom he knew a lot, cordial, gracious, impulsive, enchanting, as he had been informed; and towards her he, the stranger, felt calmly, politely appreciative, and absolutely nothing besides. As to himself, he *was* himself. It was quite simple.

She led him into a big room, whose seventeenth-century furniture and portraits and view of terrace and roe-deer he was quite lucidly admiring. She gave him some tea, which had grown cold and bitter, and she waved away the butler's attempts to bring any fresh, all in the pleasure and excitement of talking at once about *their* discovery. She called it *our* discovery and poured out volumes about it, while the Archæologist listened resignedly, eating undue quantities of bread and butter and wondering whether this gracious and ample lady, with a beauty more fascinating for being on the wane, could possibly be the woman to whom he had been writing, not merely the posted and written letters, but scores of unposted, unwritten, barely formulated ones, for many months

past. Her voice, for one thing, was much more like everyone else's than like the one she had had at Pisa ; if anything, rather bell-like with an imperceptible drawl and blurring of *r*'s. Instead of which he recollected it, quite distinctly, as dusky, a little veiled, decidedly contralto and Duse-like. And he himself, how much more massive, weighty, older he was than he had thought. If this lady was of an age past all defining, he, decidedly, was no longer a boy.

“ Shall we go and see Louis Norbert's portrait ? ” she said, eyeing his bread and butter impatiently. “ If we are quick there will just be light enough for a first look.”

He bowed, in the fashion he had so stupidly acquired on the Continent, and opening the door, passively followed her. But when she had swept across two or three ground floor rooms, she suddenly stopped at the foot of a Charles I. staircase, and turning sharply, exclaimed with vehemence :

“ No, not to-day ; I am really becoming an intolerable bore with Louis Norbert. Fancy my calmly forgetting that you have come all

the way from London and Pisa and walked for hours from that dreadful station, and in this wind! I *am* disgracefully inconsiderate. And it isn't quite respectful to our dear Louis Norbert to be selfish and idiotic about him. So we'll see him quietly to-morrow. And now you go and rest or have a quiet smoke in your room before dinner."

And she pressed his hand lightly, warmly, freely, in her large and beautiful one.

"I *am* glad you have been able to come," she said—"it's awfully kind of you to have thought of it."

She was adorable, no doubt of it, but she *wasn't* the lady he had written to; only a sister or cousin, with some features and gestures, some grace of character and manner in common.

The whole of that evening, which seemed extraordinarily roomy and full of well-spaced incidents, was spent by the Archæologist in wondering what had become of *his* Lady Venetia.

This one was really much more beautiful. He had never before seen her, he reflected, in

evening dress, and had thought of her as existing permanently in the motoring garments or the travelling tea-frock he had known at Pisa. And accustomed as he had become to the rustic simplicity of his Italian friends' villa-life, the unexpected appearance of the real (or unreal?) Lady Venetia, with shining shoulders and glancing diamonds, filled him with a kind of superstitious awe, the dining table (even with poor Lord Arthington's cripple's chair and the nursing sister's habit disturbing the effect)—the dining table affecting him, with its silver and flowers and waxlights, as some manner of altar.

Patet dea, he afterwards discovered himself inwardly repeating. Moreover he discovered that Lady Venetia—*this* Lady Venetia—had (how express the thing without going wide of the mark?) what in anyone else he would have called (but such words were evidently unsuitable to her) an *intellectual prestige* he had never before guessed. Indeed, he wondered how he could ever have written to her as he had: she was now unattainable by his

criticisms, and he might be justifiably afraid of getting himself into disgrace by what he said, but he laughed bitterly though internally at his former fear of hurting or discouraging *her*.

The prestige of Lady Venetia, vague, looming, effulgent, grew even greater (and his own importance in the moral landscape accordingly smaller) when she set to making music after dinner. What he had heard her play at Pisa, that duel and death scene music of Don Giovanni on the jangling hotel piano, had indeed haunted him ever since, but rather as part of a whole romantic situation, in which his modern self and sundry seventeenth-century ghosts were co-involved; not at all as a specimen of more or less musical proficiency on the part of the player. Now, in the music room at Arthington, he became massively aware of her being a great, a wonderful musician. She did indeed occasionally stumble, and frequently swept whole passages aside with a toss of her head (he noticed her head's constant slight upward tilt, ready for such tossing) and a "and so

on"—but she made the music step out and take its place, and, while it was there, fill the world with its ways of greatness. She was a wonderful musician.

But somehow he did not enjoy it. And during the whole evening he kept self-consciously fearing that she would leave Beethoven and Bach, and play—oh terror of embarrassment!—that Don Giovanni music, or worse even, some of the seventeenth-century music he himself had sent her; above all, he was insanely shy of the compositions of the Abbess. For he was thoroughly well aware that although he did not mind how much Lady Venetia might pour out about Louis Norbert and the rest of that story, he would dislike quite extremely having to talk about any of it himself. Not, heaven help him, because of any romantic shyness, connected with those dim romantic puppets in themselves, but because they had been discussed in letters of which he was painfully aware that he had often re-read them when they were hers, and often re-written when his own.

But, at the end of the evening, when she had decided that her invalid brother must not have any more music (Lord Arthington was about as much stage property in the Archæologist's eyes as the invalid chair in which he was propped up) and she had asked "our young friend" (so she called him) to close the piano for her, she paused with the electric switch in her hand, and suddenly remarked :

" You see, one of the things which made poor Isabella feel so sore was that Hermann got into the habit of fussing over the lamps or the candles (he pretended they smoked or guttered) whenever Italo's mother began playing the intermezzo of *Cavalleria* on the pension piano (it had an embossed ebony head of Beethoven in its waistcoat). Isabella, of course, imagined she disliked it because it was so fussy of Hermann, and that *Cavalleria* thing (Italo's mother never played anything else on any occasion) was such *very* trashy music ; and besides, the two hands always went one after the other, perpetual broken chords ; and Hermann, being German and having been

one of the Bückeburger Gesangverein, ought not to like sugary Italian rubbish. Of course that wasn't a reason for Isabella also hating the double-bass player glowering at Italo's mother from a corner of the piano ; but she just did. And one day—about six weeks ago—poor Isabella's worst, inexplicable feelings (they're called *Ahnungen* and only Germans have them) were justified. For Hermann and the double-bass player both rushed violently to help little Italo into his overcoat, each from his end of the salon, and they came bang up against each other and bumped their foreheads with incredible violence. So then, of course, there *had* to be a duel, and Hermann had the choice of weapons . . .

“Upon my word,” she interrupted herself, “you ought all to be ashamed of having such a fool as me for a friend or relation, perpetually talking such awful rot ; and as to Arthington, I believe he feels like sinking into the earth at his sister making such an idiot of herself before a learned man, don't you, Dick ? So we had better invoke the mantle of night to veil such foolishness——”

And as she extended her hand (which he had some difficulty in not kissing Italian fashion) to the Archæologist, she smiled a wide, pale blue, luminous smile of the eyes, so simply, humorously, maternally, divinely friendly, that the Archæologist, when he got to his room, felt like one delivered of a ridiculous spell and restored to unparalleled reason and happiness.

This was yet another, a quite unexpected Lady Venetia. And it was the real one.

III

In the perfect happiness of those ten days (for Lord Arthington insisted on nothing less) spent by the Archæologist in Lady Venetia's society, there were, it is almost needless to remark (for human beings must always spoil their own good luck, especially when they are young human beings), moments when that happiness seemed very near to wrecking.

Not indeed openly, indeed it is extremely doubtful whether Lady Venetia ever dreamed of such dramas, but in the squally depths of the Archæologist's unspoken feelings.

One of these occasions of tragic stress was the first time, the very day after his arrival, that he stood before the portrait of Louis Norbert.

Lady Venetia had introduced him summarily to the Muniment Room, and then showed him (with a sudden self-reproachful spasm of hostess-ship) the rest of the magnificent old house, its pictures and furniture and china closets, and its stately, efficiently-haunted rooms and mirrored galleries and monumental staircases. But she had put off the visit to Louis Norbert's portrait till after their walk among the white deer of the park to where the herons rise out of a marshy stream.

"The room looks west," she explained, "and I have a fancy for your seeing Louis Norbert the first time at the hour that I first did, all those endless years ago ; that's why I've been putting off taking you to him."

The Archæologist answered, of course, "What a capital idea," and then felt he had not said quite the right thing, and that this was too much *mise en scène*, too *voulu*, somehow. After all, Louis Norbert was only so much paint and varnish on an old canvas. . . .

"Here he is," said Lady Venetia, when she had introduced the Archæologist into a room so darkened that he remained on the threshold for fear of stumbling over looming furniture.

"Here he is ; or rather, here we are in his presence," and with a sudden sharp movement (he had noticed what strong hands, almost like very exquisite man's hands, she had, at the piano, last evening) she unbolted and threw open the shutters, letting in the low afternoon sun.

The Archæologist was aware (as people occasionally are) of its all having happened before, only he couldn't think when ; *it* being this *tête-à-tête* with Lady Venetia and the words she had just uttered in the presence of Louis Norbert's portrait.

Perhaps because he recognised all the surroundings: there were the smoky battle-pieces and the varnish-blackened boar hunts she had spoken of at Pisa, and the faded Rachael Ruysch nosegays, all in ebony fretted frames closely packed on the walls; there was the canopied bed, with cut velvet vases like hearse plumes; and there the console with huge lion's feet which she had feared would claw her in the dark, when she—good heavens, what a thought!—had been a small girl. He had visualised it all so often in his mind.

And *there* was the portrait.

As Lady Venetia had intended, the low sunlight cut the room in a narrow, silvery, dusty beam; and broke, golden and mellow, on the portrait, shifting now from the face to the hand on the sword, or on to some portion of the black dress, revealing gold threads here and there or a gold tassel—according as it moved with the sway of the cedar branches outside.

The Archæologist stepped close and looked carefully. It was a fairly good picture; or rather a fairly bad one of a very good school,

some belated disciple of Van Dyke's at a time already given over to Lely; and well preserved. All *that* the Archæologist made a note of in order to remark upon to Lady Venetia. For he knew at once that he could not, somehow, remark to her on what was his instant and growing impression, namely, how astonishingly handsome and fascinating this painted young man was, with his white, eagle face between long brown hair, and eyes like deep dark pools drawing one in. Although the date must have been the end of Charles II.'s reign, the dress had a Cromwellian austerity; and, instead of having the few pert bristles giving men of the Restoration a look of supercilious satyrs, this youth's beautiful firm mouth stood clean and pure like Milton's.

It is almost impossible to put on paper the utterly foolish things which the Archæologist was aware of thinking and feeling. It was intolerable that men of past centuries should have been so romantic and good-looking; only women were allowed that nowadays. And, at the same time, this lovely, languishing

youth was manly—that was the worst of it! Manly like a drawn sword or a finely-rowelled spur, not manly after the style of a starched shirt-front or severely well-rolled umbrella. It was unfair and intolerable. It was, in a way, shameless to be at once so appealing and so mysteriously dignified. And all the while those men of the past were a hundred times more prosaic than oneself. But, like tenors, they *sang*, and oneself only *spoke*; or rather, if oneself had any common sense and breeding, oneself held one's tongue.

The Archæologist did the latter. He stood for a long while before the portrait; and when at last he decided to turn round, he nodded gravely and merely said "Yes."

He was still further at a loss for words when he noticed that Lady Venetia, whom he had thought of as standing by his side during that station before the portrait, had retired to the open window; and that when she turned her face towards him he thought her lips trembled a little, and fancied (but it was doubtless only fancy!) that through the exquisite little veil of powder there stole a blush.

“Confound Louis Norbert,” he said to himself quite articulately; “all this is really too much of a good thing; it is silly.” But he knew, for he was analytical and also just, that far the silliest was himself.

IV

[From the Archæologist's notebook, between some quotations of the Chronicle of Basil Commenius and the hours of trains between Paris and Périgueux, doubtless in view of visiting the Byzantine Church of St. Front. This note is dated “August 28th, in train, after leaving Arthington,” and is headed “A decoy.”]

The last evening of my stay Lady V. H. took me to see a decoy, one of the few, she tells me, still remaining in this part of England.

You pass by a keeper's cottage, with puppies about. The decoy is in a little blackish wood, very close set, in the midst of burnt-up stubble fields: a series of wattled screens or large hurdles, not unlike the straw

mats Italian gardeners make for spalliered lemons, with glimpses between them of wired-over canals. And then, quite unexpected, a big pond, almost a lake, overhung by big, dark trees and high bushes ; black water half hidden under blackish lily-leaves. A whirr overhead ! and three wild ducks pass ; the false wild duck, tamed, who decoys the travelling ones into the lake and up those water-traps, to have their necks wrung, after vainly beating against wire roof and wattled walls, among those closed canals.

A heron rose as we came away, and disappeared high among the trees. When we were out of the black wood with its black lake, the sun had set ; there was a wonderful broken, filmy sky above the dry, pale fields. Lady Venetia shuddered ; and when we had climbed, for the view, on to the terrace roof of an old gate-house near by, she told me to warm my hands on the parapet still tepid from the sun ; the old grey stone is encrusted with almost invisible mosses, and it was like touching some rough and furry creature, after the tragic chilliness of the decoy.

“I don't know why I took you to that dreadful place,” she said, as we looked down from the gate-house. “An ill-omened place, don't you think, that pond and woods, with the horrid deception to the poor travelling birds? It made me feel as if long ago one of us might have been decoyed by false friends, entrapped among those wicked screens, and the black water closed overhead.”

She remained silent for quite a long while, her head tilted up in that characteristic, rather lyric attitude; and looking over the stubble fields to the last red vestiges of sunset.

Then she began to talk once more about L. N., whom she has now taken to calling the Dauphin.

“Of course,” she said, “that is exactly what happened to him. I daresay it was thinking of him made me remember the decoy.”

That evening some neighbours came to dinner, so that we had no further conversation together. And I left Arthington next morning—rather by choice than by necessity—too early to take leave of Lady Venetia.

LETTER XXXV

[This and the following are copies made by Lady Venetia of the most important passages in letters discovered in the Muniment Room by herself and the Archæologist during his stay at Arthington.]

*From Louis Norbert to Sir Anthony Thesiger
Rome : January 28, 1684 N.S.**

On our recent journey back from Spoleto, whither we went to view the temple of the River Clitumnus mentioned by the divine Maro, to Narni, where is the bridge of the Emperor Augustus, there happened a circumstance which foolishly gave me umbrage, and hath set me musing, more than is judicious, upon the mystery surrounding my birth.

As we sat on the top of the pass in a

* N.S. means that the writer adopted the Gregorian calendar in use abroad, and called by the English, among whom it was not officially introduced till the middle of the eighteenth century, New Style. [*Note by the Archæologist.*]

miserable inn among muleteers and charcoal burners, for we were surrounded by oakwoods, drying our garments after riding in heavy rain, a horseman clattered into the yard, and alighting, sate himself at the table. He ordered wine and entered into talk with us ; and from his womanish voice and mien I took him for one of such singers as this unholy country delighteth in.

He surprised us by speaking the French language very readily, and entertained my Lord with many stories of the Court of France, whither he had, he said, been called in his youth to sing. Asked what his name was he answered one very common in Rome, Mario Mancini, " but I had not the luck," he adds with a ribald jest, " of being a favourite kinsman of Cardinal Mazarino." He had the manner and address of the parasites of princes, and spake in knowledge of many curious circumstances. He affected to ask each of us his name and business, with the forwardness of such pampered fellows, and pointing suddenly to me, and fixing his bold eyes :

“Were we in France, and this honourable company not English, I should not need ask after the family of this pretty cavalier, for from my recollection of his Gallic Majesty when last I sang before him, I should swear he must be a bastard of the blood royal.”

“Bastard thyself, thou impudent semi-vir,” I exclaimed, rising, much angered. But as I was about to draw, he merely tapped my shoulder and with marvellous assurance bid me put up my sword.

“My son,” he saith, using that familiar Italian fashion, “no harm is meant. All who seem bastards may not be so, and I know some, wearing crowns to-day or preparing to wear them to-morrow, who are less honourably begotten, perchance, than yourself: *Experto crede.*”

And saying he must look after his nag, he left the room, but only after bending quickly over me in passing, and whispering something which I failed to hear, for my Lord, enlivened by the fellow’s sauciness, mistook whatever it was for some obscene jest, and

burst out laughing and shouting to me to be of good cheer.

Presently, when all the company save me, who was indeed foolishly humbled, had forgotten that impudent and ambiguous rascal, the man—if he was a man—returned with a lute he had borrowed of the innkeeper, and offered to give his Lordship a sample of the skill he had once had, before an adventurous life and many hairbreadth escapes had cracked his lovely voice.

It was in truth far from good, and indeed not that of a singer at all, but rather of a wheezy, superannuated strumpet.

He seemed, moreover, in his cups, and the song which he sang was sure not such as he or any other had sung before kings, but foolish stuff of the loves of Jove, how he deceived Semele, with a refrain tagged on from some bawdy snatch—" 'Tis a wise bird knows its own father, quoth the cuckoo"—singing the which, in order to raise a laugh again, he fixed his eyes upon me, when for some reason I cannot find, methought I had seen those eyes and something like his mien

before, though he was freckled and sunburnt and had a great stain across his face like a mask—but this must surely have been a fancy, bred of my secret disturbance at the adventure.

When he had done he distributed my Lord's present to the ostlers and muleteers, not without a dignity that staggered his Lordship, saluted all around, and, turning to me very seriously, craves my pardon for seeming to speak lightly of my lady mother, who was, he'd take his oath, as honest a matron as ever wore a wedding ring. Whereupon he thrust his hat over his eyes, and springing on his horse with more grace than we expected, ki-sed his finger-tips to me and rode off, followed by an old black groom whom we had not noticed.

Mr. Bob Lowndes, his Lordship's secret chaplain and a profound musician, said nothing should make him believe the fellow had ever learned to sing least of all sung before a court; and Mr. Humphrey Standish, the interpreter, was convinced he was no singing man at all, but some wandering trollop in

men's clothes ; his Lordship opining for his part that 'twas most likely a spy set on himself as a Protestant nobleman. But as regards me, this adventure hath made me wonder, more than I am wont to let myself, whether my birth is such as your excellent father and my benefactor's kindness would have had me believe, and I fear some contemptuous suspicions may have arisen in the minds of my fellow-travellers.

LETTER XXXVI

From Louis Norbert to Sir A. Thesiger

Rome : February 8, 1684 N.S.

EXCELLENT FRIEND AND PATRON,

This will acquaint you that his Lordship hath suddenly decided we shall spend Lent at Naples, at which place he would already be, if his departure before carnival, to witness which he had hired windows in the

chief street, might not have savoured of timidity after an accident that happened lately.

Of this, lest you should hear and be apprehensive for my person, I will tell you, albeit my Lord desireth holding it privy. So I would remind you of what I writ already, touching the habits of vengeance and secret violence of these Romans, and in especial of an attack on his Lordship's coach, on which occasion my hat was traversed by a slug intended not for me but for him. This time the villains hurt his Lordship's own person, although but lightly, cutting him in the hand as he wrenched the sword wherewith one of the two bravi (for so these mercenary cut-throats are styled) was like to run me through as we promenaded one evening before the Grand Duke of Tuscany his gardens. His Lordship having thus disarmed one of the ruffians, both took to their heels, and we set off in their pursuit. But as we thought to overtake them near the Triton fountain, or rouse some help with our cries of murder (forgetting that such cries meet but deaf ears in Roman streets), the

spadassins disappeared over a monastery wall, taking asylum, as is here the habit, in the precincts of a church. This event decided me to telling my Lord how I had noticed fellows dogging my steps of late, lurking in blind alleys and porticoes ; and had even, passing at dusk up the Spanish steps, heard a shot whistle past and fall a few yards off, a window snapping to hard by. All of which attempts were manifestly aimed at his Lordship's self, we being of the same stature and complexion, and my Lord in rivalry (to Christ's further shame !) with a great personage ecclesiastic, for the favours of a notorious Bolognese meretrix. In consequence I advised his Lordship that, not desiring to be killed for another man's fornications, I must part company, whereon he hath decided to sacrifice that mincing Rahab to his safety, and leaving Rome awhile, abandon her to her purple-gowned paramour. All this I tell you lest you be disturbed by rumours of dangers surrounding me, which, as I have explained, is not the case, I being at strife with no one, even in this evil land.

His Lordship thinks, however, that this brief absence may suffice (the prelate meanwhile wearying of his *mœcha*), and we return to view the famous Easter functions in St. Peter's church.

Wherewith I would bid you kiss your good mother's hand most reverently for me and take my constant love and service for yourself.

LETTER XXXVII

From Louis Norbert to Sir A. Thesiger, Bart.

Naples : March, 1684 N.S.

[Beginning not copied.]

Having answered your questions touching the Phlegræan Fields, the Bay of Baiæ and Avernus, and enclosed an opinion of his Lordship's physician on the vexed matter of the Tarantula or Dancing Madness of these

regions, I would now wish to beg a favour of your friendship. This is to question your mother (and my dear benefactress) touching the circumstances of my birth and parentage, which she may have forgotten or deemed it seemlier to forget, but wherewithal, methinks, I have some right, and perhaps necessity, to be acquainted. And since the lady is aged and infirm, ask her not as from me, neither put direct questions to her, such as may beget defiance in the mind of the old in years. But rather place before her such indifferent questions as will gently stir her recollections or move her to contradiction. As, *exempli gratia*, whether her adopted son may not in truth be a nephew, or other illegitimate and natural issue of the family ; what reason your father could have had for calling an Englishman by a French name. Also, whether there exist not, or have existed, papers declaring the place and year of my birth ? And such like points, the ascertaining of which may lead perhaps to the excellent and reverend lady declaring more than we credit her with knowing. And, should she ask reasons for

your sudden inquisitiveness, tell her, which is the truth, that you have reason to think his Lordship holds me for a bastard of the Thesigers, even alluding thereunto, to my certain mortification.

LETTER XXXVIII

From Louis Norbert to Sir A. Thesiger, Bart.
(Favoured by His Excellency the Spanish
Ambassador)

Palermo : March 15, 1684 N.S.

HONOURED MASTER AND MORE THAN BROTHER,

It hath occurred to me it may be unworthy of our loving kindness to hide from you aught concerning my person, even if it turn out but trifling and fantastic. Therefore I will relate to you a carnival adventure, that happened to me the eve of our leaving Rome, wherewith I have acquainted no man else. This I do the more willingly as it may explain,

or at least excuse, in your rational eyes, sundry untoward questions I had requested you to put to your mother, whereof I sometimes feel ashamed, wondering whether what I shall now narrate may not be merely a jest practised by those who deem me over thin-skinned and sensitive.

You should know that the Romans celebrate their carnival with astounding splendour and licence, compensating their everyday hypocrisy ecclesiastical, the whole population rioting in masks and disguises for eight whole days, and filling the principal street, which is magnificent with many princes' and prelates' palaces, and an obelisk at one end and the columns of M. Aurelius and Trajan at the other, with pageantry, horse-races, and races, meseems more indecent than diverting, of Jewish elders sewn up in sacks. The day before Ash Wednesday (whereon we took our departure hither) the licence reaches its highest at dusk, when everyone carries a lit taper, and seeks to blow out his neighbour's, keeping his own alight or lighting it afresh off some other man's, wherein ariseth an

indescribable hubbub and tussle between the maskers in the street and those at the windows, throwing not flowers only but anything coming to hand on their assailants' lights; all which with yells and roars more worthy of demons than men, and wherewith are not infrequently mingled the shrieks of those trampled by mischance or stabbed by enemies on such a favourable occasion.

Having witnessed enough of this foolery on the previous afternoons, I determined to spend the hours of the *Corso* (for so they call this horse-play) in hearing an oratorio or sacred opera, whereof one is given at the church of St. Philip Neri, with the intent of tempting men from those ribald scenes to the thought of God, though in fact rather to that of music fitter for the feasts of Cupid than of Christ, and the warblings of eunuchs whose vocal nimbleness is watched and betted on like the running of those riderless barbs in the chief street.

Be this as it may, having heard the oratorio, by one Alexander Scarlatto, an excellent young master, to the end, methought I would

regain the Carnival street and witness that last scene (which taketh place only on Shrove Tuesday) of putting out the wax-lights, from the windows my Lord had hired at an apothecary's over against Prince Pamphyly, nephew of Pope Innocent X. The streets of Rome were strangely deserted, save those nearest the Corso, whereto all the inhabitants had crowded, and I was able to make my way quite unmolested. But just as I was turning round the back of the great church which was once Agrippa's Pantheon, I was caught all unexpecting in a rout of some twenty maskers, Harlequins, Pantaloons, and Scaramouches, who set upon me with animal cries and obscene caperings, they having the privilege, on these days, thus to molest any citizen caught unmasked; nor do the customs of the place allow any defence against their violence. I was thus unable to get loose of these unseemly knaves—some of whom dressed as women in dresses of Columbine or Esmeralda—and perforce let them carry me along, doubting not it was towards the great street or Corso. When behold! a Captain Matamoros

among them waves his red cloak over his head and I suddenly found myself in utter darkness, vainly struggling in the thick folds, while those around crowed like cocks and shouted bawdy songs, one of them, with the treble, nosey voice these maskers make themselves, whispering in my ear that no harm was meant and I should stay quiet for the Blessed Virgin's sake. Thus I was carried off my feet and meseemed up a stair, and set down at the top in solitude and silence, doubting not that the jest would end in some strumpet's lodgings, and suspecting that his Lordship himself might be privy to it, having ofttimes railed me for my Puritan manners.

When I could free me from the cloak, I found myself in a large room and, as expected, in presence of a woman, completely masked and veiled. She sat quite motionless, and having waited that one whom I recognised as the Captain Matamoros of that gang should have finally extricated me from those ignoble wrappings, she signed for himself to withdraw and, with a gesture, bid me advance to the table where she sat and whereon stood

sundry globes, planispheres, and other astrologer's baubles.

The room was lighted only by a double flambeau. But I could see the woman's very dark eyes under her vizard. She began speaking in that masker's mincing voice, hiding her own, but was unable to keep it up, whereon I noticed her natural voice was of the kind Italians call *contralto*, a little muffled but very sweet. She asked whether I were the young Englishman of the Count (for so they call him) of S.'s company. Then, whether it were true I was the son of French parents, albeit reared in England? On my answer it was the case, but in what this might concern her, she put her hand upon my arm and said, because, being versed in astrology, she wished to give me certain warnings. And continueth to interrogate me, whether I had remembrance of my parents or birth-place? What things I could remember of my infancy? Whereto I answered that my memory went no further than your father's hospitable home. Finally she bid me tell her the day and hour of my nativity. Whereat I was

constrained to confess I knew them not, being but a waif adopted by your father's beneficence, and having only been told that my age, being near your own, must be twenty-four or five.

At this she seemed to wonder and vainly sought to extract more, which I, not knowing, could not give. But I on my side bid her tell me her name, and for what reason she asked these questions.

"My name," she saith, "is not that it should be, nor is it useful you should know it. The maskers call me Queen Berenice, and that suffices." For the rest she added there was reason to believe she had known my parents, although she was forbidden to tell their name.

On my conjuring her, if she guessed it, to tell me, she shook her head; and when I seized her hand bid me beware of violence, for the maskers tarried without; and said she had no certain knowledge of aught, and perhaps knew no more than myself. "Nor," she adds, "is it any of this I have to speak about, but to give you warning that it is

written in the stars that your life is jeopardised in your twenty-fifth year, and more especially should you ever learn your parentage," as, having studied astrology all her life, and having never proved mistaken in her calculations, she could assure me.

Whereat a thought struck me.

"But, madam," I exclaimed, "if you have been able to draw my horoscope, 'tis evident you must know what myself does not, namely, the day and hour of my nativity and therefore who I truly am."

And I flung myself at her feet, embracing her hands and imploring her to speak. But she merely raised me up, kissing me on the cheek through her vizard, whereby I learned herself was shedding bitter tears. And :

"Go, go," she cries; "seek not to learn any more nor imagine myself acquainted with aught but doubts. These may well be the wild fancies of a mind half crazed by too much rumination of the past. And it may well be you are not him I seek for and tremble to find. But whosoever you are, the very doubt, and

alas! perhaps my own inquisitiveness concerning you, encompass you with dangers; wherefore let me conjure you leave this town and country and return to the safety of your adoptive home." Thus, embracing me once more, she left the room, bearing the flambeau in her hand, whereon I was once more in darkness, and once more muffled in that cloak and carried away, this time however in a coach at full gallop of six horses, as I clearly felt. When I could see again I found myself on the steps of a little closed church at the foot of the Aventine, among weeds and cypress trees, and not far from the place of public execution at the "Mouth of Truth," so called.

The earliest stars were showing in a sky as fair as ours in summer, exceeding peaceful. And as I sped along, amazed and wondering, I heard the guitars and songs of bands of maskers, and the hum of the crowd returning from the Corso, some still carrying lit tapers, and prancing about the winding streets with laughter and revelry.

LETTER XXXIX

*From Louis Norbert to Sir Anthony Thesiger,
Bart.*

Rome : June 2, 1684 N.S.

[Description of the Temple of Minerva Medica and palace of Prince Falconieri omitted in copying.]

. . . To the strange sights it hath been given me to witness in this country—whereof a burning of relapse Jews at Palermo, an eruption of Mons Vesuvius and the Roman Carnival, one has been added quite unexpected, and compensating by its rarity for the wedding of the Sea by the Duke of Venice, that having happened already on Ascension Day. This singular spectacle is no other than the crowning of a poet at the Capitol of Rome; or rather, making it but the more unlikely, of a she-poet.

I was carried there by my good friend, the Abbot Manfredini, who never neglects an occasion of pleasing my curiosity. This ceremony hath, I believe, taken place once already since the death of Tasso, who, you will remember, untimely died beforehand, but the poet's name escapes me at this moment. The first thus to be crowned was Francis Petrarca, for I see no evidence that, as some of these Romans pretend, the same was done by Virgil, nor seemeth it likely that the antient Romans, whom that same divine Vates admonished they should leave arts and letters to Greeks, caring themselves only for arms and legislations, should have turned the Capitol or the Victor's Crown to such effeminate uses. How effeminate they could become is indeed shown by the ceremony I witnessed, albeit I must confess that were it ever seasonable to bestow such honours on a female, this one deserves them, not only for her genius and learning but her maidenly decorum and manly gravity. This maiden is barely out of her teens, but hath already filled Italy with her fame, not merely as a poet,

scholar, and natural philosopher, but also, whereof this country is an eminent judge, a musician.

The ceremony took place in the hall painted with the battle of the Horatii and Curatii, over against the famous equestrian statue of Marcus Antoninus Philosophus. There was a vast concourse of all the first nobility, ambassadors and many cardinals, the coaches reaching to the church of the Jesuits ; and a huge crowd of the commoner sort, since in this country even the unlettered and the mendicants respect letters and arts, and even rustics and boatmen will quote whole staves of the poems of Tasso and their curious Gothick Dante.

The Capitoline bell rang, mortars were fired from the Castle of St. Angelo, and I own I could but smile that such to do, in the very places that witnessed Scipio's and Cæsar's triumphs, should now be made because a young gentlewoman writeth Greek and Latin verses and singeth extempore stanzas in her own tongue to the lute. All of which she did do to our universal admiration, showing

herself indeed a marvellous fine scholar ; nor could I fancy anything more similar to how we figure the enthusiasm or *æstrus* of a Muse or Apollo, than this maiden's air and expression when inventing her verses, which she chanted to the accompaniment of an archi-lute in her own hands. But, as already mentioned, more than at her genius, I wondered at the modesty and nobleness of her demeanour, and the manner wherewith she thanked for this great honour ; and, handing her crown of bays to her aged father, addressed him, on the spur of the moment, in a Latin elegy recounting how he and no other had led her infant steps towards the Muses and Apollo.

And, from all I learn of Signora Artemisia, for such is her name, this admirable lady's virtue and discretion do emulate her genius. In this modern Babylon no noble nor ecclesiastic, however high placed, hath boasted of her favours, nor is the faintest breath upon her youthful virtue. She resideth retired enough at Pisa, a town of the great Duke of Tuscany, with her venerable father, a scholar and former captain of the Spanish garrison of

Orbetello ; and only here in Rome has obligation to her benefactors made her admit much company into her presence. I have had the good fortune, always through the aforesaid Abbot Manfredini's friendship, of being presented to her at a great academy (for such they call it) of poetry and music in the palace of Don Livio Odescalchi, and been graciously admitted to present my respects to her and her excellent parent in their lodgings over against the church of St. Ignatius, where every other evening they entertain much company, both learned and of high birth, the Cardinals themselves disdaining not to clamber to the top of the house where this tenth Muse and fourth Grace holds her Parnassus.

We have already discoursed on many points of learning and taste, and the Signora Artemisia adviseth me to return to Tuscany, her native province, where, she says, letters and arts are cultivated to much better effect, and life is richer in humane virtues than in Rome, which is indeed, meseems, the Cloaca Maxima of all wickedness, as it was once the citadel of all virtue and glory.

This young gentlewoman left Rome yesterday, a great concourse of nobility accompanying her on horseback and in coaches to the gate. The Abbot Manfredini urgeth me to cultivate her learned friendship, inviting me in most obliging fashion to visit him in their native Pisa, where, it seems, they live as neighbours, although meseems he hath more partiality for her than she for him; and whether for that reason or weariness of my company, she hath dissuaded me from accepting such hospitality, saying I should find better company in Florence, for which city she offered me letters, adding we might meet there later belike, but discourselling me the sojourn of Pisa during the summer heats, the air of that city being, she says, thick and feverish, and no better for strangers than that of Rome.

Yet, were it not that I seem to guess her strongly disinclined to our continued acquaintance, I own I would readily risk an ague and yield to the Abbé's hospitable importunities. But, matters being such, and the air of Pisa thus unfavourable to my

complexion, it seemeth likely I shall continue in the company (whereof I feel well-nigh sated and weary) of his Lordship, and accompany him soon to Bologna and Venice.

Moreover I am impatient of your answer to a letter dispatched to you some couple of months back, touching some questions put to your reverend mother, an answer you will doubtless send me by the new gentleman who is coming to join his Lordship's company.

LETTER XL

From the Archæologist to Lady Venetia

Villa Viscardi, Evola, near Pisa,

September 28, 1909

DEAR LADY VENETIA,

I am so excited following up a discovery in the Abbess Artemisia's secret correspondence, that (hoping always to give you

some definite news) I have delayed thanking you for your copies of Louis Norbert's letters. Do not think me unappreciative. I have re-read them several times, both for their own extraordinary interest, and also, I confess, because they remind me of the mornings when I had the honour of assisting you to find them during that happy week under your brother's hospitable roof. Those mornings in the Muniment Room ! How long, how incredibly long ago do they seem ! And how far, far off are your lawns smelling of cedar and yew, your flocks of white deer in the beechmast ; and how arid and desolate has not Tuscany seemed on return, with its autumn look of being an old bone, shapely like the ramskulls on antique altars, gnawed and bleached by the centuries and the elements !

To return to the Abbess's secret correspondence. Thanks to the Marchesina Viscardi (I am, as you see, back at the villa for the vintage), we have got beyond the mere scrappy enigmatic messages conveyed in quotations and underlined words of various books—messages, you may remember, which

seemed to harp perpetually on plots and dangers, and particularly on danger from poison. And at last we have been able to decipher a whole letter.

The book containing it is, of all unlikely things, a treatise on the Kingdom of Sweden (*De Svedicis Rebus libri XX.* etc.) by Abraham Vossius, printed in Leyden 1652, an octavo of four hundred and fifty pages, fine Elzevir type. It is bound, unlike any other of the Abbess's books, not in vellum, but in greyish paper with pale blue flowers, or rather in common cardboard covered with a grey flowered wrapper, labelled in a fine, scholarly hand, which I love to believe the Abbess's own! What has made the cypher easier to read is that not merely single words of the book have been used, but whole sentences. By the way, perhaps I ought to remind you of the system of the correspondence, which I explained to you before coming to Arthington, and once, I think, there. Well, the Abbess's correspondent probably writes his letter first, in this case in Latin. He then takes the book he is going to send her (a book lent or returned)

and hunts in it for words and sentences suitable to his purpose, probably altering his letter whenever he does not find exactly what he needs. Then he draws up at the end, or on the inside flyleaf, a list of pages, the pages on which the sentences composing his letter will be found, interspersing this list with a certain number of notes intended to mislead a casual reader ; for instance, *vide* p. 12, 35, 80, 115 *et seq* : “ Swedish militia p. 135 ”— “ Character of Gustavus Wasa, p. 120 ”— “ idem of Gustavus Adolphus, p. 300,” with blank numbers in between ; also occasionally Latin expressions, as if the reader were collecting them for reference to a dictionary, instead of which, if put in connection with other words faintly underlined in the indicated pages, they serve as connecting links, while giving an air of bona fide scholarship to the whole business.

Also there are other passages, more visibly underlined, which have no reference at all to the message, and are merely intended as a blind to an indiscreet, unintended reader. All this involves an immense waste of time and

ingenuity for those who are *not* in the secret (as is shown by the Marchesina and I having made so very little progress hitherto) ; but I have no doubt that previous correspondence had already settled some points for those who were in the secret—for instance, “ next book I lend you read chapter so and so, or from verse so and so to so and so ”—besides, the Marchesina and I are merely antiquarians playing with a historical riddle ; whereas the Abbess and the unknown correspondent were dealing with life and death, poisonings and hairbreadth escapes, and, unless I am greatly mistaken, they were lovers.

(“ Eh già,” says the Marchesina, all *jeune fille* proprieties disappearing before the hereditary antiquarian’s instincts, “ eh già, nuns did not renounce worldly interests in those days.”)

To return to the letter in the Abraham Vossius—here it is, translated for your benefit, such as I have this very morning finally pieced it together (if only the Marchesina does not prove to me this evening that I have pieced it all wrong !). It is headed : “ To the Muse

Urania, from Thyrsis, an obscure and unfortunate shepherd." But it is all in the third person, as follows :

"That he is prepared to die, knowing himself, though innocent, surrounded by enemies and persecuted by the gods. That being an obscure orphan no one will miss him. And that, as he cannot induce the only one who makes his life worth having to escape with him to the Hyperboreans, he prefers to await his fate consoled at least by her presence."

Have you any idea, dear Lady Venetia, who this unlucky shepherd Thyrsis might be?

Same date—II.30 p.m.

Have you any idea, dear Lady Venetia? Yes, I am sure you have, for (although you hated me for saying it!) you are a born poet and novelist, that is to say, a superlative historian! But the Marchesina Viscardi is not a poet nor a novelist, but a hereditary antiquarian and born archæologist, that is to say, considerably of a detective.

When, after dinner this evening, and when her father had already dropped off to his nap, I placed the Abraham Vossius and my Latin copy of the letter rather triumphantly on the big table among the illustrated papers, she merely glanced at the letter (this young lady, only less astounding than Artemisia, reads Latin as easily as she drives an unbroken Maremma mustang!) saying: "We will go through that presently. But first of all, let us have a careful look at the book itself."

"Careful look!" I cried indignantly. "Why, dear Marchesina, do you think I have extracted all that without careful looking?"

But the Marchesina laughed.

"I mean the *outside*," she said. "First of all, this is a *borrowed* book."

"Evidently," I answered rather impatiently, wondering whether she could be trying to avoid an enquiry into the Abbess's love affairs, "or rather it is a *lent* book, since the letter it contained could be conveyed only by lending or giving the book to her."

“That is not what I mean,” said the Marchesina ; “it is a borrowed book because it is a covered book ; and it is covered because there is something on the binding which would have identified the sender. *Con permesso*”—and so saying, this marvellous young detective, after passing her thumb over the face of the paper wrapper, adroitly slipped a paper-knife into its corners, and lifted it off. And there, instead of the coarse cardboard I had taken for granted, was a limp calf binding, and on it, embossed, but half erased with a penknife, a coat of arms and a scroll. And what that coat of arms is the Marchesina does not know ; but YOU do, dear Lady Venetia, and you know it, *not* because you are a “born poet and novelist,” but because you are an Arthington.

For rubbing her finger along the defaced inscription above that obliterated shield, the Marchesina spelt out slowly and letter by letter, these letters :

“ Ex libris :

. . . NI . . . H . . . AU . . .
H . . . SI . . . R . . . QU . . . S.”

which, being interpreted, means that this " De Rebus Svedicis " of Abraham Vossius once belonged to the library of Nicholas Thesiger, Knight ; and therefore that the correspondent of the Abbess Artemisia, the unfortunate, obscure Shepherd Thyrsis whom she warned against poison and who refused to save his life by flying from her presence, was Louis Norbert de Caritan. And *he* was . . . well, that is *your* contribution to this web of fact and fancy.

I am, dear Lady Venetia,
Yours, etc.

LETTER XLI

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington : October 5, 1909

MY DEAR FRIEND,

" My contribution to this web of fact and fancy " !

Oh my dear, dear young historian, what a moment you have chosen to return to that theme with variations! To begin with, I can't help laughing quite loud at the drama of solemn surprise with which you have staged the discovery of my great-great-great whatever he was's *ex libris* on the Abbess's book, as if you had not known all along, *as if you had not been hinting in all your letters*, that *the Abbess's correspondent must be Louis Norbert*; as if either you or I would have troubled a button about the Abbess and her secrets unless Louis Norbert had been at the bottom of them!

And now you strike an attitude of amazement when your nice young Italian friend slips a paper-cutter through a paper binding and reveals what we have known for ever so long! I suppose that you do it just as very scrupulous persons deliberately persuade themselves of a lie before telling it to others: it keeps up the standard of truth! And then, when I have the straightforwardness to say that I feel sure when I do feel sure, you talk of my contribution to a mixture of fact and fancy!

Has it never struck you how a little modern comedy of errors between a *very simple* aged woman and a very *complicated* (but *very nice*) young man has spun itself, like a cobweb, round this terribly solemn tragedy of men and women who have been dead more than two hundred years ?

Well, I wonder I can write all this, except that experience has shown me that one's sense of humour sometimes gets uppermost at tremendously serious moments. And this is one.

For, just as you are talking of mixtures of fact and fancy, here is L. N. coming forward *himself* to tell the secret of his birth !

I found this letter last night, absolutely unexpectedly, as I was giving a farewell look (for I may soon be leaving Arthington) at the Muniment Room. It was in a box labelled "Miscellanea, 1750-1800," among a heap of drawings by great-grand aunts and my great-grandfather's copybooks. You will notice it contains a request to destroy it ; and this request probably resulted in the partial acquiescence of Anthony Thesiger not putting

it with L. N.'s other letters, and its eventually getting not destroyed, but mislaid. I have at once copied it for you, and you will perhaps read it with difficulty, because my hand shook so. Meanwhile good-bye, dear Professor; and what a pity Pisa is so far from Arthington!

Yours, etc.

LETTER XLII

From Louis Norbert to Sir A. Thesiger, Bart.

Rome : (date not given)

DEAR FRIEND, MY HONOURED PATRON,

Mr. Thomas Wyndham arrived yesterday from London, bringing me yours informing me how your reverend mother (whose kindness hath made her more than mine) declareth ignorance of my birth and origins, and gently chideth me for giving my thoughts to such vain wonderings; whereby it is

moreover plain you also blame me, howsoever the harshness is blunted by undeserved brotherly benevolence.

That I put questions touching these things was indeed perhaps, at the time of writing my letter, mere derogation from the resolve (wherein your mother and yourself had schooled me) to accept unquestioning the mystery of my origin and even perhaps its shame, as not affecting my own will or duty, but put such strength as God may lend me into cultivating virtue and knowledge that may compensate the involuntary shortcomings due to the fault of others or malice of fortune. But there hath happened since wherewithal to give me reason, and justify my strangeness. Whereof I now will communicate to you as much as prudent, albeit I was decided, until your letter came, that my lips should remain for ever utterly sealed for sheer amazement.

The thing I tell you of happened to me weeks ago, when we returned to Rome, not, as intended, for Easter, but, owing to his Lordship's changeable passions, only for Whitsun-

tide. The second night of our journey back from Naples we lay at San Quirico, but not at the inn. For on his Lordship's coach and our saddle-horses entering the village, they were surrounded by men with torches, who invited my Lord to lie that night at the Castle of the Duke of Columna, which is on a cliff above the river and very ancient. It is indeed what we call a donjon, but with a fine house built into its defences with ceilings painted with mythologies and brave silk hangings and gilded leather of Cordova on the walls. But it appeared to have been disused for many years, and the serving men who had met us with the torches, and who indeed were mostly peasants and clad in little better than rags, though with silver badges and laced hats of the Duke's colours, had no food but such husks as themselves eat to set before us, nor sheets to the beds, which were very fine of cut velvet and cloth of silver, but wherein we lay in our clothes, in part also because my Lord misdoubted that this hospitality might not hide some villainy such as these mountains abound in, where bands of outlaws sometimes

possess themselves of a nobleman's house, or a nobleman himself disdaineth not to become no better than a robber chief. We were glad however of drying ourselves at the bonfires they lighted in the largest chimney-places I have ever seen, for such of us as came on horse-back were wet to the bone. We were treated also to the choicest wines, out of the bailiff's cellar, whereof my companions partook over-much, but I refused to touch, partly for fear of drugs, and also hatred of the swinishness whereby, as Shakespeare sayeth of the Danes, we English make ourselves the fable of these soberer Italians. And this abstinence I mention lest you should interpret amiss the strange recital I shall now make you.

I had been put to lie by myself, separated by some vast saloons from my Lordship's suite. I sat up till the castle clock struck midnight, reading in the pocket "De Amicitia" which was your parting gift. And when I had laid me down I could long find no sleep, but lay with wide-open eyes in that great room, listening to the rats and the rain and wind, and scanning the ceiling very nobly but lewdly

painted with the loves of Jove, as I could distinguish by the glare of my dying fire. The fire had died down all but a few embers, and I was still broad awake, but with closed eyes seeking sleep, when meseemed a door creaked and a rustling crossed the floor. I was like to have called out, yet merely felt for my sword and pistols under my pillow. But having placed them in readiness, and neither seeing nor hearing aught else, I closed my eyes and was about to sleep, when a light smote my lids and a hand fumbled very gently at my collar. It was a woman's hand, and a woman was bending over me, screening the light of a lanthorn from my eyes. She instantly moved that hand to my mouth, enjoining rather than enforcing silence, and let the light shine full on me, leaving herself in the darkness. My first thought had been of some robbery, then of such adventures as young men meet but the more for the jealous Spanish prudery of this country. And knowing his Lordship much inclined to such, made sure I was mistaken for him. The more so that the woman remained attentively scanning my

features, nor interrupted her scrutiny when I did ask what she sought. There was in her manner that which removed all thought of such light tales as had occurred to me, moreover persuaded me she was not young. Perchance, I thought, she is such as walk in their sleep, and whom to wake is to set a-raving. In which belief I lay still, decided not to thwart her. After a while of fixed gazing on my face, she took my sleeve, I lying on that bed dressed all but my coat, and rolling it up to the shoulder, carefully scanned my right arm in the light of her lanthorn, a process she repeated for the left one. Having done which she sighed deeply, and unfastened my shirt at the throat, I having removed my steenkirque the better to sleep. You are to understand that all this time, which seemed eternal, I could not see her face at all, but merely her person's outline cloaked and hooded; whereas I lay, blinking, in the full glare. When, as she stooped closer and closer over my neck, a sudden recollection of tales of vampyres, being evil spirits that suck men's blood, laid hold of me, and I began saying my prayers.

Which noticing by the movement of my lips, she pointed to a birth-mark on my throat and asks me whether I had always had it? employing to my surprise the *French* language, and not with the pronunciation of these Italians, but, meseemed, rather as I had heard it spoke in Paris.

I answered, with as much of the language as I possess, I believed it to be so. But almost without awaiting my words she flings herself upon me, embracing my head and kissing me; withal sobbing so bitterly she seemed like to die, with a sound that wrung my heart yet filled it with terror, crying, "My son! my son! they have stolen my son!" Whereat I made sure she must be some poor crazed woman, perhaps imprisoned in this lonely castle, as the wives of even great princes may sometimes happen to be in this lawless country where the great live but for their lusts and vengeance. And indeed, revolving what she then told me, I often think that either she or I, or both, must have been mad. But of these matters I dare not write, not merely from the fear that others

may read, but because the very words would seem, as perhaps they would be, madness.

This only would I have you believe. Ever since that night my life, albeit unchanged in other men's eyes, seems turned into a bedlam haunted by evil spirits of worldly ambition and suspicious amazement. Wherefrom I vainly seek to distract myself by study, converse, and I may now add, love ; and that I spend many hours on my knees imploring the Lord to enlighten my spirit and save it from the abyss yawning around me, were it only by giving me, if such His pleasure, safety and peace in immediate and premature death.

For I awake of nights dreaming of that woman's wailing embrace, and start up sobbing myself ; but, worst of all, my waking hours are haunted by her words, and by the ceaseless strife of belief and doubt, hope and fear concerning their import. For which reason, I would implore you also for your prayers, standing so bitterly in need, not of human, but of Divine aid to my distracted spirit.

Having meditated this my letter, keep its contents secret from all men, and speedily destroy it.

Thine,

L. N.

PS.—Despite the little encouragement received from the learned young gentlewoman whereof I writ in my last, I am inclining to accept the Abbot Manfredini's invitation to go with him to Pisa, and this in hopes of growing perchance absorbed in other thoughts and even in other despairs and sorrows.

LETTER XLIII

From the Archæologist to Lady Venetia

Florence : October 25, 1909

DEAR LADY VENETIA,

Your letter containing Louis Norbert's astonishing account of what happened to him in that castle has followed me here after some

delay. And although, in my despised capacity of self-deceiving sceptic, I might point out that it by no means contains absolute proof of his identity or even absolute proof of the identity of his mysterious visitor, I am a great deal too upset to do so, owing to a discovery I have myself just made, and which shatters a great deal of our historical construction.

This discovery, which I have made, thanks to a friend's researches in the Florentine archives, is nothing less than this :

Louis Norbert was not poisoned ; he was not murdered by the Abbot Manfredini. He died, as any normal young gentleman might have died at that time, in a duel.

You remember how vainly I have searched for any notice of his death in the police registers of Pisa, and in those of the burying confraternities, who ought to have mentioned him, since, although he was a heretic, the Abbé Manfredini had contrived (probably by some story of having converted him) to get him buried in the consecrated (nay, arch-holy !) ground of the Campo Santo. Well, this

morning my good friend Professor Aronson, to whom I had told of my researches, handed me a copy of a letter he has meanwhile discovered among a miscellany of seventeenth-century Grand Ducal documents. It is from a "Grand Prior" (I suppose of the order of St. Stephen) writing on behalf of the Grand Duke.

After a variety of other allusions there is as following :

"With reference to the death of the young Englishman recently killed in a duel, about which His Highness has been extremely agitated in his mind for the reasons you are aware of, that renegade Moor (Marrano) of an Abbate has begged me to point out to His Highness's consideration, that from certain information which he obtained from the young man himself concerning things which passed in Rome and wherein the Mad Woman (*quella matta*) His Highness knows of played a part, this accident at the hands of that foolish captain has happily delivered His Highness and many others (*altri non pochi*) of a responsibility which might have

been troublesome"—and in a postscript adds :

“ Perhaps it has not yet come to His Highness’s knowledge that there were no seconds involved in the duel, and that the captain having shortly afterwards died of a wound from the Englishman’s sword, we have been happily saved all the tiresome judicial enquiries ; nor could the whole business have possibly received a more satisfactory and truly providential solution at the hands of fate.”

Satisfactory and truly providential solution ! That is poor Louis Norbert’s sole funeral oration—pronounced to reassure a little timorous Medicean Grand Duke.

Is this, I wonder, the last we shall ever find out about your dear friend’s—and perhaps you will allow me to add—*our* dear friend’s end ? Shall we never discover who was the “ foolish captain ” ? Evidently not a bravo, for that kind of gentry was *not* foolish, and never risked getting killed like this unknown duellist who had killed Louis Norbert. I fear all this will remain for ever hidden in the

gulf of two centuries and a quarter, which, odd as it seems, separates us, unpassably, from those men.

I am, dear Lady Venetia,
Yours, etc.

LETTER XLIV

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington : November 2, 1909

MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

What is all this? Louis Norbert not murdered by the Abbé? Killed in a duel like any other young gentleman of his day?

But it isn't possible, my dear young friend. It . . . well, *it can't be the case*, whatever nonsense those Medicean spies (of course spies are *all* liars) may choose to write.

As to the curtain having dropped and our never discovering anything more, why, my

dear Professor, you surely don't mean to sit down calmly under such a dispensation, at the very moment too that the plot has most thickened! Seriously, do you intend our joint work to *come to an end*? Do you mean that L. N. and Berenice and Artemisia and the Abbé Manfredini are now going to be wrapped up in tissue paper like so many puppets and the box containing them to be put away on a shelf of our lives which neither of us will ever touch again?

Well, you are young and an archæologist, and I suppose you have dozens of other mysteries awaiting you in the future—archæologists are a kind of Don Juan passing from mystery to mystery, instead of from mistress to mistress. So it's all very well for *you*.

But think of me! *I* can't begin taking interest in Saxon churches or who wrote the letters of Junius, or Kaspar Hauser, or the Etruscan language, can I, *at my age*? And just, as it happens, at the moment that—well, I don't mind telling, you are such a friend and will feel indignant—just at the moment that my

poor silly old brother thinks fit to solemnise his comparative recovery by marrying a woman (and you guess *who*) who has been entangling him for the last two months, so that, having fought my fight against her, I shall have to depart from Arthington and become once more a wanderer on the earth's surface. Think what a moment to say to a woman, after stirring her up all you were worth to historical researches: "*Finis*; no more of *that*, my dear lady."

And to say it merely because someone has discovered that a Grand Ducal spy says L. N. was killed in a commonplace duel!

Really, your letter is enough to push one to strange resolutions!

But there *must* be more documents. What became of the Abbé, what became of Artemisia? And who was the "foolish captain" who killed L. N. in that duel and died of his wounds?

Captain! Now I come to think of it, hasn't there been a captain somewhere before in this story? Let me think. Now *where* could a captain have come in? I have it!

Artemisia's father had been a captain in the service of Spain (something about a Spanish garrison—is there such a place as Orbetello?). L. N. says so in a letter. *And I believe* it was Artemisia's father who killed Louis Norbert. So, instead of the story being at an end, we are now in the very thick of it!

Your *very* disappointed and dispirited old friend, etc.

PS.—This is a silly letter, but it expresses my firm conviction that, *with good will* and being so kind a friend, let alone so wise an archæologist, you may find the means of not letting this story drop at this particular minute.

LETTER XLV

From the Archæologist to Lady Venetia

Pisa : November 6, 1909

MY DEAR LADY VENETIA,

First let me say—so far as I can without intrusiveness—how deeply I grieve at any

annoyance which may be threatening you. Also, how much I would give to be able at least to divert you from the thought of it.

You are quite right. I was a mean-spirited wretch. This wonderful story must not finish off miserably in mere doubt and darkness. We will know how things went with L. N. and Artemisia, and whether, as you suggest, her father was the " foolish captain " who killed him.

I will stickle at nothing ; and you shall not be sent away with a *no* to your curiosity, even if I have to sell my soul to satisfy it, as the alchemists and master-builders do in mediæval legends !

I am proud and happy to be allowed to remain, dear Lady Venetia,

Your devoted fellow investigator, etc.

LETTER XLVI

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Arthington : November 10, 1909

MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

A very strange thing has just happened, enough to make one superstitious. As if he had heard the words with which your letter ends, Louis Norbert has appeared once more !

This is how it happened. There is a mirror in the room I have been occupying here, which—I mean the mirror—has always had an odd fascination for me, although quite the most eerily unbecoming one I have ever looked into.

I ought to tell you that, for the convenience of my brother's illness, I was, on my arrival last winter, put into what is called the Queen's Room—the usual room of the usual Queen

Elizabeth, which is habitually kept only for show. It is rather grue, as such low-ceilinged, mullioned rooms always are to my mind, particularly when hung with life-sized tapestry, whence huge arms and legs and the flagons of the Marriage of Cana or Anthony and Cleopatra are always striking out. But when I came I was far too anxious and miserable to mind, and then I got accustomed and rather liked it. Anyhow, in the dressing-room adjacent, called the King's Closet (no scandal about Queen Elizabeth, I trust) there is this mirror. It isn't very old—Queen Anne or thereabouts; it is round, on a swing frame, and stands on a kind of parrot-perch by the window, so that you can tilt it to see all kinds of unexpected views of the park in it, rather like a camera obscura, for it's awfully tarnished. It amused me to turn it about and see my face, which was turned into a ghost's by the blackened, spotty glass, with a changeable background of leafless trees (they are leafless again) of brown beechmast with the deer in and out, or of terrace and grass walks.

But when I turned the mirror so as to get the room itself for background (bluish-green hunting tapestry this King's Closet has, looking very dusty in that tarnished glass) I always felt rather eery, as if some other face were going to appear in it alongside my own. I *never* once thought of L. N. in connection with it, so don't imagine I am going in for the *natural supernatural* and such rot!

Well, this morning as I tilted the glass to see a particular cedar in the sunlight, what must needs happen but the thing comes down with a crash on to the floor—I mean the oval mirror itself—the hoop in which it pivoted remaining on the stand, like an empty parrot's hoop. I hate breaking mirrors—don't you? and was very much relieved to see the glass quite intact, merely separated from the wooden frame. My maid, who had joyfully hastened in at the crash, consoled me for the accident by remarking that the glass had come loose before, "and," she added, "they must have mended it—people were very untidy, I think, my lady, in those days—by sticking in an old piece of letter."

And she handed me the paper which lay under the circle of glass on the floor. It was a piece of thick yellow paper, folded wedge fashion to keep the glass in place. My heart beat a little, for I thought I recognised the hand. I thrust it in my pocket and went down on to the terrace (the stags were roaring in the woods all round) and read it in the twilight. It was Louis Norbert's last letter.

Here it is, copied for you.

LETTER XLVII

From Louis Norbert to Sir A. Thesiger

MY HONOURED MASTER AND DEARER THAN
A BROTHER,

Opportunity having offered of getting these to your hands through the politeness of Mr. Nathaniel Ingram, an English merchant, about to sail from Leghorn, who hath ridden

over to Pisa for sundry business, I take it to let you know of myself and present you and your mother with my affection and gratitude, which will end only with my life. Albeit, this may, indeed, be nearer unto its end than my youth warrants. Howsoever it be, I resign myself into God's merciful hands, well satisfied that if my end is near it should be through no intended fault of mine, but only the malice of enemies whose motives I do not even know.

Let me explain to you, my benefactor and more than brother (as indeed your father and mother have been more than such to me), that after the things whereof I writ you from Rome I was near dying of a wound from a dagger four inches long, given me one afternoon as I was returning from the sacred opera of Jephthah at the church *in Miranda*, and precisely as I was turning a blind corner near the famous fountain of the Tortoises, where I felt myself caught by the cloak and stabbed, but was, by the mercy of God, able to pursue the two villains who had thought to end me, but being hirelings, flew for their lives to the

nearest church, outside of which I fainted and was presently carried to an apothecary's and thence to the hospital of the *Consolation*. This was the fourth attempt from which Heaven allowed me to escape. But as his Lordship had long since and very publicly departed from Rome to Venice, it became evident that this attempt must be intended not for him (as, owing to his many gallantries we had hitherto thought) but for myself, which tallies likewise with sundry warnings I had myself received, and some of which I writ you of in due course. In which fears I was confirmed by a learned gentleman whose friendship, as I writ you, I had made, and by whose urgent advice I removed to Pisa as soon as my wound allowed, taking leave of all my English friends and even of my servant, who elected to follow his Lordship to Venice. Of the wisdom whereof I now have sundry misgivings, and from many things misdoubt me whether I have not been betrayed into the hands of worse enemies and am not a hostage imprisoned in that false friend's house; whether it is indeed thus only time

and God's will can reveal. But I have been warned that nothing good is intended, and that sicknesses whereof I am fortunately recovered were by no means accidental, nay, rather meant to have finished me. Indeed for this reason I am taking what may prove my last opportunity to present my love and duty to you and the lady your mother, and explain how it has gone with me in the event of your learning my end.

Not that I am without a friend in this place. Heaven in its goodness hath sent me such an one that even yourself could not be more beloved. But this person, while urging me to fly and putting all means at my disposal, for instance the ship of Mr. Nathaniel which will bring you these, this same incomparable friend is the very reason why I cannot think of my safety, but only of hers, which is jeopardised daily for my poor person. And for the love of this unparalleled friend I will ask what may be a last favour of you, dear Patron and Brother, to wit, that when as I pray it may please Heaven that you take a wife and get children, you shall call your

daughter Artemisia, in memory of the friend
of your friend L. N.

*At Pisa in the house of the Abbé Manfredini,
canon of the Cathedral.*

August 13, 1684 N.S.

Postscript to the copy of this letter :

My own second name, and that, I am told, of every eldest daughter of an Earl of Arthington, conforms to L. N.'s last request.

VENETIA ARTEMISIA HAMMOND.

LETTER XLVIII

From the Archæologist to Lady Venetia

Pisa : December 21, 1909

MY DEAR LADY VENETIA,

I told you that, rather than leave your curiosity unsatisfied, I was ready, like Faust

and others among my fellow pedants, to sell my soul.

I have now done so, and I venture to send you herewith registered, and as a humble Christmas greeting, its price.

These Memoirs of the Abbess of St. Veridiana, previously known in the world as Artemisia del Valore, were composed in a language you are not quite familiar with, though (for reasons which I will later explain) I am unable to inform you whether that language is Latin, Greek (which that learned muse possessed fluently) or mere Italian; so what I send you is a translation made to the best of my slight powers.

It will, I trust, satisfy you, if of nothing else, at least of the utter devotion of

Your humble servant, etc.

PS.—I must not forget to warn you that, like other persons who have entered into similar agreements with the Evil One, I am bound over to complete discretion concerning the details thereof. I must therefore entreat you

to desist from all questions concerning the original of this document and its whereabouts, let alone the manner in which it has come into my hands.

THE ABBESS'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

*Done into English, for the Lady Venetia Artemisia Hammond, by her humble servant,
"THE PROFESSOR."*

ALBEIT while I lived in the century the voice of slander had never found wherewithal to impugn my fair fame and maidenly honour, and I was held up to the admiration of mankind not merely for my learning, but my virtue ; yet none the less my life, until it pleased Heaven to touch my heart with grace, was in truth given over to naught but vaingloriousness and worldly emulation ; and that to my twentieth year, when I received, or desecrated by receiving, the crown of Petrarch. Even from my tenderest infancy, for it happened that my dear father, being already white-haired and disabled by wounds got in the service of his

Catholic Majesty, was left a widower with me an only daughter but a year old, and as soon as I was returned from nurse and able to speak, instead of confiding me, like other young damsels, to the sluttish sordidness of serving wenches, or handing me over to the ignorance and apathy of nuns, my father, I say, lacking a son, and I a mother, determined he should be the latter to me and I the former to him, accordingly applying his every thought and care to my upbringing.

Thus did it come about that I early learned such things as only few women are taught, and more precisely those for which I was destined to become famous in this foolish world ; particularly humane letters, poetry, the Castilian and French languages as well as my own Tuscan, philosophy both natural and metaphysical, mathematics and music, in all of which, by his kindly indulgence in teaching and a certain natural readiness of my own, I made huge progress without suffering in health or taking too much the habits of a pedant.

But although my body did not suffer, since

I was able to dance and ride as well as any other gentlewoman, and men praised the good looks wherewith Fate had endowed me—although therefore suffering not in my bodily vigour or my maidenly decorum, yet my soul, as already hinted, grew up entirely devoid of spiritual grace.

Almost the earliest of my recollections is being stood by my father on a table and made to recite, with puerile voice, the death of Dido and the lament of Hecuba to an audience of learned men. At five years old I was carried to Florence, there to extemporise verses before the Grand Duke Cosimo dei Medici, on which occasion, bursting into sobs, the good Grand Duchess Victoria took me in her arms and soothed me with sweetmeats and kisses, sowing the seed of direst worldly vanity in my childish soul. Soon after, being but seven years old, I was elected a member of the Philharmonic Academy of Bologna and of the Alphean of Pisa, and subsequently of others more than it is profitable to enumerate; on the first occasion the Cardinal legate, afterwards His Holiness Innocent XII., stuffing

me with morsels taken from his own plate, not without my infant disgust. And by the age when other maids still play with dolls, I had been carried from one end of Italy to the other, receiving on all hands universal flattery and such homage as ill beseems any of God's creatures, all of which I swallowed with greediness, vanity growing with that it is fed upon ; until, in the twenty-first year of my age, it pleased the Senate and people of Rome, in the reign of Pope Innocent XI., that I should receive publicly at the Capitol the Crown of Poetry.

It was at this moment of my life, and indeed on this very occasion, that my eyes were opened to the vanity of the world and of my ways in it. As I knelt in the midst of that vast assembly, bowing my head to receive the laurel from the hands of the Senator of Rome, something seemed suddenly to give way within me. My heart, which had been beating violently, stood still, freezing my limbs and checking my breath ; my mouth filled, as it seemed, with bitter ashes, and I was aware that I had, in some manner, died, and

was looking on, I knew not whence, at a simulacrum or *eidolon* of myself moving and speaking with a semblance of life. This simulacrum it was which rose and gave thanks, and then, using my limbs and voice but not my will, swept the lute with unreal fingers and improvised a poem which my real self heard as through an incalculable distance.

While this was proceeding, and I knew that in some inexplicable manner I had died and left but this ghost behind me, the eyes of my spirit (in whatsoever way those of the body may have been busied) were led into the crowd before me, and without seeing a single one of the hundreds of spectators I had seen hitherto all too vividly applauding me, they, *id est*, my spiritual eyes, rested on the face of an unknown youth (such at least he might be described) which met them with a look that transpierced my soul and restored it to life, though to a changed one. Such a face our painters have given to the youthful saints and martyrs, Stephen and Sebastian, or indeed that Angel who carried the lily to the living

Lily of Carmel and spake the words—"Hail Mary." So that I doubted not I had beheld a vision, and so soon as I was restored to my lodging hastened to my closet and there wept bitterly and thankfully for many hours, which proceeding my good, foolish father and the worldly-wise men surrounding him explained very learnedly and with abundant Greek and Latin vocables, as the prostration of bodily spirits following too long and high-pitched a tension of those curious parts anatomists cut out and examine with their glasses, especially as Renatus Cartesius has taught, of the gland called *Pinealis* where the soul resides.

When, after some few days of solitude and meditation, cloaked as sickness, I was enabled to resume my ordinary existence, I did so without difficulty, but feeling that it concerned me no longer save in so far as it pleased my father, and that, save for him only, it was the same to me if God had sent me instant death or bid me live on to fourscore and ten, all happenings having grown indifferent and dropped from me like the cloud

which the sun first lowers from the mountain-tops and then sucks away into nothingness.

Such was my happy, nay blessed, state ; too blessed, alas ! for me, unworthy, to remain in, since it pleased the Origin and Fount of All Things and Love which moveth the Sun and the Stars, to withdraw me from the sight of Its ineffable ways and plunge me once again into the fires of worldly passions, albeit such, this time, as may be accounted rather purifying than destructive to the Soul. For it happened that, but a few days after the events I have described, and while my father and I tarried in Rome after that foolish pomp at the Capitol, that, being present (though only in the body) at a festivity in the house of a Roman nobleman, there was brought to my father and me a young English Cavalier in whom, to my amazement, I seemed to recognise the face which had met my gaze during that first strange fading away of my baser self. Though whether, as the sceptical followers of Aristippus might say, it was this youth's countenance that had taken on prophetic and supernatural meaning because

of the disturbance of my spirits ; or whether, as I incline to think, there was but an accidental resemblance (as a real man might bear to the effigy of an angel) between that messenger of the Eternal and the youth in question, no man's wits are sufficient to decide. Howsoever, so soon as I beheld him and that resemblance which seemed well-nigh identity, I felt as the poet Dante sayeth, that Love had appeared for the first time in my life, taking the guise of this youth and making me exclaim, "*Ecce Deus, fortior me qui veniens dominabitur mihi.*" And this was really my first, as it had been my last, experience of Love, the habit of applause having hardened my heart, and the many attempts of wicked men upon a damsel exposed to the public gaze, and protected only by an aged father, having up to that time inspired me with such disdain of the other sex as is fabled of the virgin amazons. But, for this reason, and likewise the indifference or timidity of the young Englishman, who was an orphan of no estate and dependent on the benevolence of a nobleman of that country, this passion of

mine found no outlet or expression ; and albeit we met frequently and discoursed lengthily of many things, there appeared not in the demeanour of either aught revealing the love I felt and afterwards learned was not unrequited.

But worldly though was my passion, it was ever mingled both with a wish to be worthier for the beloved one's sake, and also with an ardent desire to serve him if possible at my own expense and even to the sacrifice of my very love. Of which latter an opportunity offered all too soon, whereof, alas ! I fear my sinful weakness took but a half-hearted grip. For learning that my father and I resided at Pisa, this Cavalier showed himself greatly inclined to go to that city for the pursuit of his studies, and thereby awakened the evil designs of a wicked man who makes it his trade (since Hell has still to claim him) to serve kings and courts by extracting unsuspecting men's secrets, and dispatching these victims, if desired by his patrons, with silent, decent means *ad inferos*. Since it would seem that the uncertainty of this

youth's origin had attracted the suspicion of sundry among the great of this earth, and perhaps raised the hopes of certain others, in such a way that, all unsuspected by himself, he walked for ever among the traps and pitfalls of some and the snares and larks' mirrors of others, an innocent and helpless victim. The aforesaid evil man and atheist priest, perhaps egged on to further wickedness by jealousy, he having more than once proffered me filthy love and been contumeliously repulsed, although I had kept this secret for fear of damaging my poor old father, this mercenary eavesdropper and murderer, I say, took the occasion of possessing himself of my beloved (since such he will ever remain in my heart), as he might have done of secret letters which he could sell one by one, threaten to make public or destroy to extort payment from powerful and guilty persons; inviting the poor youth to accompany him to Pisa (where none of his English friends should be near him) and there board with him and make free use of his library and collections.

These things, which later events proved, alas ! but too true, I did not at this time know, being ignorant of the circumstances of that Cavalier's life ; yet was I filled with deep suspicions of his would-be friend and host, and such evil forebodings as must, methinks, have been sent by Heaven. In consequence of which, my passion transcending its own wishes, I used such arguments as I could find wherewithal to dissuade that youth from going to Pisa, withholding from him only my suspicions of that villain priest, thinking them belike uncharitable. Yet, though I argued my best, and even willingly incurred the doubt of being shrewishly averse to him I loved so dearly, it must be that I merely deluded my own conscience, using means such as I secretly knew would prove insufficient, and refraining from the one means ready to my hand to end that dangerous project but with it all my hopes, to wit, accept an invitation of the Emperor to settle at Vienna in the capacity of Cæsar's court poet and composer. With these sharp scissors I ventured not to cut my love's poor hope, pretending merely to myself

that I was breaking its thread with weak and fumbling fingers. By which selfish delusion of myself I brought about horrors surpassing those of any fabled Hypsipyle, destroying both my father and lover, and, but for the mercy of God, my own soul. Whereof the reader shall now judge.

Having bidden, as I lyingly told myself, a last farewell to that English Cavalier, I travelled with my father to the Court of the Duke of Savoy, there to exhibit myself in such poetic contests as already seemed to me not glorious but shameful. And having refused to enter into correspondence with that youth, returned to Pisa with an easy conscience, albeit hidden therein was the hope, growing to certainty with every day, that, disobeying my warnings, he would have proceeded to that city. And the joy I felt was coloured with expectation, not surprise, when the next day that Cavalier came to salute us and I recognised my fraud, but recognised also the overwhelming love I bore him, whose violence I had not hitherto suspected, and whose joy laughed all my fears

and scruples to scorn. But alas! the very next meeting these proved but too justified. The English Cavalier, seen in the light of day, was strangely pale and thin, and on my pressing him, admitted that he had indeed contracted some slow, insidious malady since his arrival. These words he spoke in the presence of my father and others, and also of that wicked poisoner in whose house he lodged, and who, feigning extravagant friendship, never let him out of sight, but, for one excuse or other, ever dogged him like a shadow. Neither the days following was I able to see him alone, or warn him of my suspicions, that malignant hypocrite pretending deep concern in his ailment, and a motherly fear lest any imprudence should increase it. Thus, meeting followed meeting, without our ever being alone, that youth's virtuous diffidence forbidding his seeking opportunities of declaring his love, and my dear father's jealousy having been artfully raised by that priest, not of Christ but of Satan, well knowing that the old man dreaded nothing so much as love or marriage which

would separate me from him and cut short those foolish triumphs wherein his paternal fondness overmuch delighted.

Imagine my despair, seeing my lover perishing day by day and unable to warn him of his danger! At last, seized with desperation, I bethought me of a means of communicating with him, for he had neither friend nor servant of his own, but lived in that foul assassin's house all unsuspecting, waited upon, nay jealously watched, by the villain's accomplices in the guise of serving folk; the villain's plan being perhaps not yet to kill, but so to weaken his health and spirits as to make him a prisoner, and then, if events required it, dispatch him easily and noiselessly in such a way as to avoid scandal. And, the youth once confined to his house and couch, it was clear to that traitor that the habits of my sex and age and my father's jealousy would put that poor victim beyond reach of my warnings. Accordingly, I devised the plan of sending that sick Cavalier a book wherewithal to beguile his idleness, wherein I placed a slip, stating he would find

information of interest to his studies on certain pages, and on these pages I faintly wrote in the margin numbers of other pages, in which I had underlined separate words, which, added together, made this phrase :

“Beware false friends. You are being poisoned.”

Having dispatched the book by my father's hand, he being well disposed to the youth as long as sickness kept him away from me, I spent the next hours praying to God and making vows to God's Mother and the Saints that this message might not miscarry ; neither is it possible to express the length and agony of the hours until there came an answer.

This was brought, all unwittingly, by the villain priest himself, who was ever seeking opportunities to see me and do me displeasure. Let those who read this confession imagine my consternation when this villain arrived, and after many fulsome compliments just as he was leaving, drew forth the book I had sent to the Englishman two days before, and fixing impudent eyes on me said that our

poor friend, the English Cavalier, had found this book too pedantic for his taste, and returned it to me. In order to hide the agitation of my spirit, for I felt myself grow pale and red, with fear and impatience to examine that volume, I affected anger and, snatching the book from him, threw it rudely in a corner, exclaiming that I did not hold much by his Englishman's taste in books or by his manner towards ladies. Whereat that other one was mightily pleased and, taking snuff, merely asked what could be expected from barbarians and heretics, and went his way. Hardly was he gone when I picked up the book and tore it open. The numerals I had written had been effaced, and my first thought was it might have been by the hand of the traitor. Judge then of my joy when I discovered at the back another set of numbers which led, by the mode I had invented, to other underlinings, making the words "Greetings and gratitude. Love makes life worth keeping."

Thus was it possible to check for a while the monster's attempts, since the Cavalier,

feigning a sick man's whims, refused all cooked food, subsisting only on fruit and eggs, which on the pretext of my father's farm, I was able to send him ; adding, on the score of its special age, wine of our vintage in closed phials. By which means the Cavalier was able to keep in life and even grow strong enough to eat once more at his host's table, who, suspecting his suspicion, suspended for the time his evil plans and ostentatiously ate first of all whereto he helped his guest.

We had meanwhile become accustomed to a secret correspondence by such means as I have already described, finding great sweetness in discoursing freely of our love, which we had meanwhile confessed to each other in this fashion ; while preserving in our meetings the manners of strangers to one another. Nor can I possibly tell the marvellous joy of this strange courtship, wherein never came a kiss nor barely a handclasp, nor even such language of the eyes as would have been noticed by strangers, but only riddles and symbols concerted together in those letters made up of

a few words underlined in books that passed from hand to hand ; and also such messages as could be conveyed by music, for the English Cavalier frequenting the assemblies held in various noble houses, I composed a number of songs and instrumental inventions, which my poor guileless father hastened to get printed, wherein to express freely all that I felt for that excellent youth. And these, on such public occasions, I would sing, turning away from where he sat for fear our eyes might meet ; but putting into my voice, as I had done into the words and notes when I invented them, all the raptures and hopes and fears which love brings in its train. Indeed such was the blissfulness of our strange intercourse that we wished only for its continuance, neither hoping for aught else nor allowing ourselves to fear the future.

But an opportunity occurring of an English merchant-ship sailing from Leghorn, that Cavalier, in a message conveyed in Xenophon's *Cyropædia*, put an end to that foolish happiness by asking me to fly with him to England and become his wife, adding that it

could be cloaked as a journey to show my learning before the English Universities and Court. To which I replied, by the same device of secret correspondence, that both my religion and my duty to my father forbade me, since he would never consent, being old, to leave his country for ever. But even while I was answering thus, I became aware, from the altered looks of my lover and his returning ailments, and from I know not what in the manner of that devilish priest his jailer, that danger was closing around him once more. Whereupon, terrified by his obstinacy, and feeling as if the loss of my love would be as nothing compared with the loss of my poor lover, I resolved that he must seize the occasion of that ship and save his life even if it meant our parting for ever. And this, not having time to convey through our usual correspondence (which might be discovered by an all too great exchange of books), I brought to his knowledge the selfsame evening of that my resolution, which will live for ever enshrined in this poor heart, since it was the last time of my looking upon my lover's

countenance until I saw it, O horror ! rigid in death.

There was a great assembly at the house of one of the chief citizens of Pisa, whereat I was to sing, together with other musicians ; and knowing this the Englishman, albeit sick of the insidious poison which was being administered to him in some mysterious manner, hastened to be present, but dogged as always by his jailer-murderer.

During the earlier part of that evening, whereon I seemed to feel my hair turn white, I tried, even recklessly, to enter into private conversation with that Cavalier, but every time found myself face to face with his would-be assassin, who persecuted me with flattery and signs of partiality more fulsome than ever. At last, bidding the violins follow my lead, I went to the harpsichord and pretended to show the assembled company various new compositions of mine ; and then, suddenly calling the Englishman, asked him to second me in a duet which I was writing, wherein he obeyed me much surprised, for there were other musicians present more able

to do it, although he was, like many of his nation, well versed in music and gifted with a voice which, to my enamoured ears, was sweeter in its manliness than the tones of our most famous singing men.

So, sitting at the harpsichord, I petulantly cried: "Now, English Cavalier, you shall show what your nation you so boast of is truly worth in music. So read your part and follow my lead, as these worthy virtuosos (meaning the fiddlers) will also. And mark you, do your best, for it is not the business of a cavalier to raise a laugh against a gentlewoman's inventions."

And, looking up at the audience with a brazen boldness very unlike myself, I winked, as if inviting them to the discomfiture of that poor stranger; and began, in mock heroic guise, the entreaties of Hypsipyle, which I made ludicrous enough, imitating in buffoonish ways the graces and affectations of several famous singers there present; until the audience began to laugh. But the Englishman, pretending to enter into the sport, sang lustily, reading his part which I had scrawled

a few moments previous ; while I fixed my eyes on him, commanding him now loud, now soft, but in reality asking for an answer to the words, which were those of the Daughter of Danaus praying her bridegroom to flee. " Say yes," I said, " say yes, that thou wilt go, beloved," and with my eyes made him understand that this buffoonery was in sooth serious. But he, the more I sang, " Say yes," the more, insisting on his part, he sang, " No, no, I will not ever go," with such expression of resolution on his countenance as left me no doubt of his meaning, and froze my blood in my veins. Whereon I purposely tripped him with a wrong modulation and broke off, he singing, " No, no, I will not go," amidst the laughter of the assembly, upon a dissonance, which too well expressed the tearing of my heart. But I rose from the harpsichord, and turning to the assembly said this buffoonade was called *Don Quixote turned opera singer* ; and thanked the Englishman for valiantly seconding me, saying I hoped he would do himself equal honour with this my musical comedy when, as I heard to my regret, he

would be back in his native land ; but he, affecting to laugh, hummed his part, " No, no, no, I will not go." And thus, in the midst of peals of laughter, this dreadful evening closed. But as we descended, many of us guests, down the staircase of that palace, the Englishman, seizing my hand cried, " Ancora," and with a most melodious voice sang again his phrase, wherein I joined, and the arches rang with the united declaration of our love, voice clinging unto voice. Then kissing my hand and shouting, " No, no, I will not go," he bowed and disappeared out of that festive place, among the senseless applause of those misunderstanding guests still bent upon buffoonery.

The next day, which was also the last, and the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin, brought me a book ; it was Abraham Vossius's *De Rebus Svedicis*, belonging to the Englishman, bound with the arms of the family which had fostered him, but, lest they should catch my father's eye, covered with a flowered grey paper. How many months has not that volume been the companion of my days and

nights, stained with my tears as, for the thousandth time since, I spelt out the well-known riddle of numerals and words. It is, of all my worldly possessions, the only one it cost me to part from, it and its companions of our secret correspondence, on my giving myself to Christ. And for this reason, considering it as the sign of all my offending towards God, I refused to give it, as I did all my other books and music save what had passed between the Cavalier and me, to the convent which I was entering; giving these confidants of my love and misfortune to a dear friend and cousin, who little guesses how great a part of my life, and how much of my bleeding heart, is closed in that small volume which she has thrust, with one or two other seemingly insignificant companions, on to the shelves of her husband's library.

In this volume my lover repeated what he had sung. He refused to go, preferring to face death in my presence to seeking life in death far from me. "By the time you read these words," so I spelt out, "the ship will be

setting sail from Leghorn to England, leaving me behind to live or die near you."

It was, as I have said, the day of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, and I knew he was mistaken, as no ship could leave a Tuscan port on so great a feast. In three hours, at most, of a fleet horse, the harbour of Leghorn could be reached from Pisa, and the English ship boarded under cover of the night. My resolution was instant. Calling a groom whom I had once nursed through dangerous sickness, I told him that, after the heat of the day, my spirits longed for a ride in the pinewood by the sea; but, owing to my father's fear of rheums and fevers, charged him to silence, and bade him bring two of our horses, saddled, round to our garden gate at the moment when the whole town would be preparing for the procession, and my father, with the other notables, walking in it; myself pretexting a headache against going. My plan was to show myself to that groom habited, as is the custom of Italian gentlewomen when riding on horseback, in clothes of masculine shape and material, and then

make my lover mount instead of me. Or else, taking him in place of the groom, pretend myself ready to fly, and leave him at Leghorn. The more I revolved these plans, the more aware I became that I should be obliged to choose the latter ; but I decided to take counsel from the moment, fixing only in my mind that, either with or without my company, one of these horses should carry my lover to the seaport.

But how convey this to him ? A message might reveal all, after the strange scenes of the previous night. So I determined to have once more recourse to song. The house which was his prison was over against ours, only a narrow square, where stands the equestrian statue of Grand Duke Ferdinand, intervening. But, owing to the heat of the season, I knew that all the inhabitants were within-doors reposing, and moreover, all shutters and windows closed to exclude the fiery air ; so I must wait till evening released them. At last the endless afternoon drew to a close. I rose and threw open my window and stepped on to the balcony. The air was

still burning, and the garlands slung for the procession, and the carpet of flowers which it was to walk over, emitted a scent as of some sacrificial rite. Presently the windows opposite opened; and after a few minutes the villain priest, dressed in the robes he profaned, came forth from his house, followed by all his servants, and my father did alike, dressed as I can now see him, in the ancient Spanish fashion, in black with a gold chain, and a ruff on which his beard looked cut of alabaster. He and the priest greeted as neighbours, and, with their household, walked slowly towards the Cathedral, there to receive the banners and tapers they should carry.

My lover, being a heretic (although that priest his host led people to believe him secretly converted to our faith), could not take part in this sacred show, but would, as I knew, probably await within doors until the procession should pass through our square on its homeward way, when, being already dusk, he could enjoy the spectacle thereof unnoticed. I knew that until the procession

started from the Cathedral there was half an hour, and after that nearly an hour till it could pass under our houses on its return journey; and during this brief time my lover's safety must be compassed.

I pushed my spinet to the window, as if in search of air, and playing loud harmonies, began to sing, feeling sure that he would hear my voice and come forth.

How long I sang without an answer I cannot tell. It seemed to me an eternity; yet no answer came. Desperate, I sang louder and louder, waking the echoes of those empty houses, all of whose inmates were gone to the Cathedral. Once at the window, I could sign him to come across in the safety of that desolate place. After a few minutes a window opened, hitherto shut, and in the gathering twilight my lover's voice arose, very still and sweet, in a song of his native country, which he had once told me was called, "Come live with me and be my love."

He sang indeed in answer to me, but as if to raise no attention and without coming forward to the light; whereas, fearless and

desperate, I stood upon the balcony facing the rising moon and singing loud to give myself courage.

“Come down,” at last I shouted, pretending to be declaiming some recitative, “come quick and fly with me, your faithful bride is ready.”

There was no answer and I stood petrified, awaiting him, sure he must be coming down and fearing he might lose time in seeking his money and arms. After a minute or two one half of the great house door opposite did indeed fly open with a crash, and out of it rushed my lover down the steep steps, but pursued, enveloped, by a dozen men, one or two bearing lanterns. For an instant there was a scuffle of feet and a murmur of voices, then suddenly one voice arose. It was that of my father crying, “Die, thou vile heretic seducer.” Then came a clash of swords and a muffled shriek, as if of one whose mouth was covered by a cloak. I know not how I reached the street. But when I did so those men had disappeared, and there lay my lover, his dead face turned up to the moon, pierced

with a number of wounds, while my father leaned against a wall, still grasping his sword, but with a great wound in his side, and presently fainted for loss of blood. I do not know what happened, save that I fell on the Englishman's body ; and the last I was aware of was the voice of the traitor priest crying for help from the windows of his house, wherein he had lurked and hidden my poor father ; and in the distance the tapers and torches of the procession advancing towards us with the sacred chants between the houses.

My father, when I assured him of my innocence, swore to avenge me and my dead lover on that traitorous villain who had pushed him to this hideous deed, and by whose servant's hand, and not, as was pretended, the Englishman's, he had received his own fatal wound. But he died a few hours later ; and I remained alone between the dead bodies of my father and lover, men who should have been united in love for me, but whom love for me and the villainy of that monster had united in hatred and death.

My father had indeed confessed that it was the wicked priest who, fanning his foolish parental jealousy from the first, had at length made him believe myself dishonoured by that Cavalier ; and, having got wind of the plan of flight, hidden the old man in his house, pretending meanwhile to join the procession. But since my poor father died within very few hours, and was long speechless, the villain was able to throw the whole blame of what he chose to call a duel on him, pretending that, so far from having pushed the poor old man to this violence, he had returned home missing my father from the procession and therefore suspecting evil, and then attempted to defend my lover, asserting most impudently that the latter had, thinking himself attacked, turned upon the servants who were trying to defend him, and thereby been finally cut down by them in the confusion following on the duel. And such was the hypocrisy of that atrocious murderer, or such the power of his employers, that my efforts to bring him to trial all miscarried, the whole occurrence being treated as an accident

brought about by the light conduct of a woman in whom public applause had quenched all the scruples natural to her sex.

Thus, while I barely ventured to accompany my dead father to his resting-place, such were the taunts and gibes flung at me by young and old wherever I showed myself, that assassin was allowed, out of the money paid him for his murder, to raise a slab to his victim, having curried favour with the ecclesiastical authorities by perjuringly pretending to have converted him to the true faith ; himself composing an epitaph whereon he boasted of his friendship for the deceased's alleged original nation, and called upon the passer-by to give a prayer to that poor victim of his villainy. It was not till some years later that, rather from some caprice of his various secret employers than any recognition of his many infamies, this man was disgraced and sentenced, and then only to imprisonment in a papal fortress, whence he is doubtless at this moment machinating fresh evil.

But as for me, it behoves not to speak of

my sorrow and the shame and despair that nearly brought me to lay sacrilegious hands on the life which God has lent me. Suffice it that a year or so later I took the vows in the convent of Saint Veridiana, of which I am now, however unworthy, the Superior.

May the blood of Christ and my many tears wash out the sins I have, even unwittingly, committed; and those which for my miserable sake have been committed by other poor sinning mortals!

Written at Pisa, in the year of Salvation, 1697.

LETTER XLIX

From Lady Venetia to the Archæologist

Bruton Street, W.

New Year's Day, 1910

MY DEAR PROFESSOR,

I don't mind telling you that, in the secret of my chamber, I have been crying like

a baby over the Abbess's story. And perhaps over something else besides, which is, I rather imagine, the suspicion that my dear learned young friend is a genius. But you have told me not to ask you about the compact which has put this manuscript in your hands, so I will cheat my curiosity by telling myself that you have, on the contrary, got the Evil One to steal it for you out of the Marchese Viscardi's library ; only I wish the Evil One might turn out to be in reality an angel in disguise, namely, the Marchese's delightful young learned daughter.

Upon my word, I really do not know (and the more I think it over the less I can decide !) whether I believe you to be a dealer in stolen goods or a poet !

Be this as it may, now, dear Professor, that, thanks to you, the puppets into whom we put perhaps a little of our own life have come to so tragic and beautiful and appropriate an end—now I must tell you something about myself.

I am going to marry my cousin R——whom you met at Pisa. He has a son almost

as old as I, and now his daughters (whom you perhaps remember) are both married, he wants someone to keep his Embassy for him ; and I, as you already know, have been entirely superseded at Arthington. Sir Edward R—— is an honourable and a useful man (as men go !), liberal-minded enough, and *not* boring, though a diplomat. And the situation will suit me all right. For how can I expect, at my age, to find another Louis Norbert to fall in love with ?

And you, my dear Professor, having replaced Artemisia del Valore reverently in her monastic grave, and hung some wreaths of bay around the lyre carved upon her tombstone—you, some day soon, won't you ? will let me know that her place is taken in your heart by some dear living countrywoman of hers, learned and lovely as she, with whom you can, in years long hence, when the cicala is sawing in the noontide or the olive faggot crackling in winter, discuss the strange story which happened at Pisa in 1684. Or was it rather (the thought suddenly strikes me) in 1908 ?

Meanwhile believe in the constant gratitude
of your affectionate old friend,

VENETIA ARTEMISIA HAMMOND.

PS.—Can you read the notes I have scribbled
above? It is the duel music of *Don Gio-
vanni* and Donna Anna's lament over her
father. It has been running in my head ever
since finishing the Abbess's story. Do you
remember I played it to you after that walk
at Pisa in the winter moonlight? Some day
or other when my cousin and I shall have
been shelved from our Embassy, and you will
be a famous historian, we must all make a
pilgrimage to Louis Norbert's grave, and then,
with fingers as decrepit as that old hotel piano
(do you remember it?), I will play that music
for you once more.

THE END

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