

STORIED  
ITALY

MRS HUGH FRASER



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STORIED ITALY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR



“A DIPLOMATIST’S WIFE IN  
MANY LANDS”

“REMINISCENCES OF A  
DIPLOMATIST’S WIFE”

“ITALIAN YESTERDAYS”

“SEVEN YEARS ON THE  
PACIFIC SLOPE”





ROME  
*S. S. Trinità de' Monti*



# STORIED ITALY

BY

MRS. HUGH FRASER

Author of "A Diplomatist's Wife in Many Lands," etc.

With Illustrations



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## Chapter One

"UNDER ONE ROOF"

June, 1914

**I**T has happened to me to take over a friend's house during her absence, and among the strange properties that a twentieth-century woman of art has gathered round her there is one which has given me my moorings at last! I have made friends with a picture. Perhaps "made friends" is a rather presumptuous term for my feelings towards it, for these are tinged with awe, amounting at times to fear. The picture is hung high on a soft grey-blue wall just opposite my writing table. From a background of unbroken black a face shows in profile, a young, pale face, as strong as it is delicate. Not a lock of hair strays from the black folds wound closely round it. The deep blue eyes look straight before them, and from the impenetrable draperies rises a slender white hand, beckoning imperiously. There is menace in the face, menace in the gesture, but menace benignant, as of a warning spirit calling a mortal from the brink of deadly danger. The deep old gold of the frame bears a name and a date—those of a great Umbrian master, but he never painted this beautiful alarming phantom who calls me

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voicelessly out of the danger and turmoil of to-day to the large seclusion of the past. Sweet and severe and terrible, I obey you—and live, for an hour or two ere stretching my spirit again on the rack of the modern world. Maybe you will show me how to face it better, suffer from it less.

There are hours even now when this high quarter of the city throws aside the cap and bells with which modernity has decked it, and relapses into a calm which lets one hear the Church bells striking the hour, or a love-song going lilting up the street, hours when the cypresses left standing here and there lean towards each other across the graves they mark and murmur wisdoms as they did of old. You must sit up very late to hear them. The roar of trams and motors only dies down after midnight and wakes in full blast at sunrise; but between is a time of precious stillness and calm, when the Church cross opposite rises clear against a starlit sky and the faithful splash of a hundred fountains comes cool on the air. In the darkness the broad new streets—so necessary for health, so destructive of beauty—lose their identity, and the city is recognisable for the city of old, proud and changeless on her seven hills. Just as the stars are paling the sweetest music floats across to my window from the great building over the



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way, where the Sisters of Charity, St. Vincent's dear “White Wings,” still teach and pray undisturbed. They have a little organ in their oratory, and through the jealously curtained windows come floating hymns and prayers sung by clear young voices, pure and musical as the lark's first song. These are their private orisons. Later in the morning the school children take up the parable, weemites singing with all their might after the young teacher who leads them. The scholars are all little ones, for nothing over six years old is allowed to go to the Sisters' Free School. After that age the children must be passed on to the Lay schools—I suppose for fear they should learn more Christianity than the authorities consider advisable for them.

My windows look into a *vicolo* which is not a thoroughfare and is approached at one end by a flight of deep steps which lead to the Sisters' back door. Some of the mothers come and sit there towards four o'clock, to take the little ones home, and this afternoon it has been delightful to watch two young women, each a beauty in her way, sitting together and exchanging confidences, in the low sunshine. One had Venetian red hair and big blue eyes, with patrician features and a skin like rose-leaves; the other was a real Roman, sumptuous in build and colour, with the profile of an Agrippina and a lot of silver combs set in her tumbled, coal-black hair. They were probably sisters-in-law, for round them danced a

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tribe of tiny girls, fair as angels, in whom they appeared to share possession, though my dark beauty never let go of her one black-haired, beetle-browed boy baby, evidently the pride of the united family.

The *vicolo* is quite a little theatre of interest, and a night or two ago this became acute. As in all Roman houses, the ground-floor of this one is turned to every kind of use except that of habitation, for although malaria has completely disappeared since the improvements in the city (a benefit which makes one forgive many vandalisms) yet the Romans have still their old horror of sleeping near the ground, albeit they are willing to work in something like cellars during the day. Well, one part of our ground floor is let to a carpenter, who indeed spreads himself and his planks and saws right across the secluded street. But at night everything is pushed back into the dark shop, which also serves as a stable for the owner's horse, the doors are closed, the place locked up, and the master carpenter goes back to his home, ever so far away outside the Porta Salara.

I was writing late on the night in question when the welcome stillness was rent by piercing cries of distress just below my window. It was a woman's voice calling to Heaven and earth for help. By the time I could look out to see what was the matter with her, the little crowd that springs from the stones of the street at any disturbance had collected, and she was holding forth like a very

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Cassandra, explaining the trouble in one of those amazingly loud Roman voices that carry like a megaphone. The neighbours, all roused and leaning out of their windows, added to the din by volleys of questions and exclamations, and it took me some little time to discover that the young woman's trouble was a vicarious one. She was a journalist, she informed the public, and, returning home this way, at the end of her evening's work, she perceived that certain "assassins" (every malefactor is called an assassin in Rome) had broken into the premises of the virtuous carpenter and were trying to steal his horse! The thieves fled at her first cry, and now what was to be done? Some brave young men who had been listening open-mouthed to her lamentations entered the dark den and led out the horse, a puzzled peaceable old thing, and picketed him to a ring in the opposite wall where everybody came and stared at him till he began eating cabbage ends and other refuse to hide his embarrassment. He had never been of such importance before! Then a neighbour, from her window, screamed that she had just remembered that the carpenter kept, not only his horse but all his money in the shop—alas, if the assassins had got hold of *that*, the poor man would have a fit of apoplexy! The amateur detectives made an examination by the light of many matches, and then came out and announced that the cupboards had not been broken into. Apparently the thieves were but poorly informed and did

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not know there was any cash in the place. A sigh of relief all round went up at the news, and then Cassandra once more took command of the situation and implored the volunteers to fetch the police and also to get a message out to the distant dwelling of the owner.

The police in Rome are a most discreet body, men who, like wise diplomatists, build up a fine reputation by keeping out of rows. It took a solid hour to find a *guardia* that night; two more to bring the owner on the scene; the old pony had eaten up all the refuse and fallen back on straw from a packing-case, and one or two of the neighbours' windows had actually been shut when, at five o'clock in the morning, Cassandra relinquished her authority and the crowd its vigil, and the *guardia* and the carpenter were left to take charge and put things straight. The carpenter embodied his personal resentment in the fearful shindy he made over mending his door, a process which rendered life anything but quiet in my apartment for the greater part of the next day.

As writing seemed impossible I wandered upstairs to pay a visit to my landlord who broods over his property, like a beneficent but watchful spirit, from the fourth floor of his huge house. There is a romance connected with it—a commonplace domestic romance which has just ended rather tragically in the sudden death of the padrone's wife. She was the only child of the sculptor Bazzico whose work is scattered all over Italy in monu-



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ments and statues and is much admired by his countrymen. Personally I feel that sculpture is a lost art impossible of resuscitation. There is no such thing as sporadic art. To be good, to fulfil its ends, it must be the natural outgrowth of the mind of a whole people expressed by certain individuals especially gifted to embody it. The only branch of art which is independent of such solidarity is music; even poetry, except in one or two wholly exceptional cases, has the colour of its epoch. Ours is not one favourable to the calm, leisurely processes from which alone fine sculpture can be born; all modern productions in that line are tainted with feverishness and affectation. The best—like Rodin’s—are revolts; the second-rate hover between revolt and plagiarism; the rest are quite beneath the range of criticism. Portrait busts, the easiest work a sculptor could be asked to do, are distressing, either through minute attention to detail, through which no glimpse is given of the subject’s mind, or through an affected brutality intended to give the impression of rude strength. Impertinence is the prevailing characteristic of modern sculpture. But now and then by some happy accident, a living moment has been caught, and though one feels that it does not belong to the vehicle in which it is conveyed, one cannot help a conscience-stricken pleasure in regarding it. As I said, Signor Bazzico’s works ornament many Italian squares and churches, but of those I have seen, only one appeals to me. A cast of it

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stands in our entrance hall and as I have to look at it every time I pass, I wonder often why the man who modelled that should have been guilty of the monument to King Humbert at Naples and other blasphemies of the kind.

This is called "The infancy of Semiramis." A young peasant, girt with a goatskin and carrying a shepherd's crook, smiles down half in amusement, half in perplexity, at a girl baby he has picked up and cradled on his right arm. In the childish perfection of rounded beauty, in the little face—frightened, rebellious, yet marked for empire—in the dimpled arm raised against her captive, the splendid, intrepid sinner of Nineveh and Babylon is set before us in clearest prophecy. Simmas, the kind young shepherd, chief keeper of the king's flocks, little knows that he is carrying the future conqueror of the East home to his wife. The doves who had fed and guarded her as she lay on the velvet moss in the jessamine and myrtle bowers, hover on the young man's arm and shoulders, even on his staff, unwilling to let their little human idol go. One looks up into his face as if asking where he is taking her. It is a poem, recalling one of the most potent and alluring traditions of our race—but it is not sculpture!

Bazzico deserves the greatest credit, however, for his perseverance in the face of heavy odds. A poor boy with none to help him, he rose by sheer persistency to a high place in the nation's estimation, and made a considerable

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fortune which he left to his daughter. Being an only child her parents adored her as the very centre of their lives, and were most unwilling that she should marry and leave them. So she stayed with them till, when she was no longer young, her mother died, and her father, suddenly realising that if he too were taken she would be left alone in the world—a fate not to be contemplated for a moment for one of these over-protected Italian women—consented to her marriage with the man who had loved her patiently for a good many years. Two months after the happy event the sculptor died, thankful to know that his daughter had some one to look after her. The *sposi* were not young, but they were wildly happy for a short time, so wrapped up in each other that they could not bear to be apart for an hour. And then, suddenly, “the wife died also,” and my poor old *padrone di casa* nearly lost his mind with grief. Had they been allowed to have their own way earlier there would probably have been sons and daughters to take the edge off his bereavement, but as it is he is the most forlorn creature I ever saw, in spite of the long visits of a charming sister who leaves her home and her husband in Sicily for months at a time to cheer her poor old brother—or at least to attempt that task, for as yet I have never seen him smile in her amiable company.

Signora Virginia is an attractive representative of a class of women who in a quiet way have done immense

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good in modern Italy. Very cultivated, the writer of one or two thoughtful books, benign, sympathetic, with the inborn good manners of the Latins, pretty still, and always charmingly dressed, I hail her little visits with great pleasure, and we have long talks on subjects which have happened to come within my range during my long years of mental and corporeal travelling but which I am surprised to find occupying some place in her limited life. Yet not for a moment would it be possible to mistake her for an aristocrat. In spite of all that is said about the fusing of classes nowadays, the two types are as sharply marked as they ever were. The nobly born women are not by any means so well-educated as those of the *haute bourgeoisie*, nor have they the ingratiating manners of the latter; one must belong in some way to their own special inner ring to love and be loved by them; otherwise their calm authoritative ways strike one as repellent. To mere acquaintances they are not, to use a very old-fashioned word—sweet; the ladies of the next class below them *are*, with the gentle considerate sweetness I used to admire so much in the ladies of Japan.

(Ah, how the East calls to one still! I was looking over an old album of Nikko photographs to-day, and the thing brought pain of homesickness. Just to feel the touch of the mountain rain on one's face, to tread the narrow brown path and the grey stone stair between the



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great cryptomerias—to pass the time of day with the peasant in his straw raincoat and the old pilgrim dame with her blue head wrap—to muse and dream and lose oneself in the divine haunted mystery by Iyeasu’s grave and hear his ghostly charger roaming on the hillside! Dear land, what is the use of saying farewell to it? It follows one forever!)

Either from economical reasons or a wish to be nearer the sky, my padrone lives on the fourth floor of this big house. The *piano nobile*, nominally the second, but a good way up too, was taken and furnished last spring by an *Eminenza*, much to the pride and joy of all the other inhabitants, and most especially of the porter, who got a grand new uniform for the occasion of the Cardinal’s arrival. Our prelate only received the Hat in May, but had been rendering distinguished services to the Church for a great many years when that distinction was conferred on him, as well as on our present Pope and on the Abbot General of the Benedictines. The Holy Father and my Cardinal, Scipio Tecchi, were born in the same year, 1854. The Benedictine was two years older. I had never been behind the scenes in an *Eminenza’s* household till I was honoured by having one establish himself over my head, and I was much interested in observing the preparation of his apartment; also, I confess, surprised at the numerous female relations who, each with a train of children, were constantly going up

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and down stairs and apparently having each some advice to offer as to the decoration of the rooms!

It is quite a business to convert an ordinary dwelling into a proper habitation for a Cardinal, especially when, as in this case (as I discovered later), the kind man was providing a home for his sister and her husband and their numerous family under his own roof. For this purpose the apartment was practically divided into two parts. That for his Eminence was furnished with double doors of red tapestry leading into his anteroom, where the lay secretary interviewed callers before admitting them into his patron's presence. A large room to the right was very beautifully fitted up as a chapel; the first on the left was the *camera rossa*, very red and very stately, with a red and gold *baldacchino* (the square canopy of state), under which was placed a large oil painting of Benedict XV. Every prelate of high rank has to have one such portrait in his house and the painting of them has kept various poor artists from starving to death in this calamitous year. In front of the portrait is a throne chair of red silk and gold—with its back to the room. It looked as if it were being reserved for the very unlikely contingency of a visit from the Pope. Beyond the throne-room other salons open out, but though the furniture is handsome and the tints not too aggressive, the cold formality of the usual Italian drawing-room reigns with its usual chilliness and strikes the visitor cold. The

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family is relegated to another wing and there is plenty of noisy chattering, scolding of servants, cries of spoilt children, a thousand cheerful disturbances which never penetrated to the other side where the Cardinal lived his own life, took his meals with only his brother-in-law and his ecclesiastical secretary, worked hard at his many tasks, and came and went in smiling dignity. Alas, the past tense has to be used about him now, for hardly had everything begun to work smoothly when our Cardinal was called, very suddenly, to a better world, and the glory has departed from the rooms upstairs.

It was on Sunday, the 14th of February, and, after being assured that he had practically recovered from an indisposition which had caused some anxiety, I went off to lunch with a friend before going to St. Peter's, where the Pope had summoned good Christians to come and pray for peace. As it was what is called an expiatory function, the Holy Father came into the church without any pomp, through the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament. The huge building was crowded from end to end this time; the only lights were grouped round the high altar, where the Pope knelt, with his hands clasped, quite motionless through the long litanies and penitential psalms. The prayer he had composed was read at the close of the service by one of the canons, so beautifully that every word reached the furthest corner of the building. We thought the Pontiff's attitude of extreme sad-



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ness was due to his regret about the war, but I heard afterwards that the news of Cardinal Tecchi's death (which took place at half-past two, just as the family were sitting down to table, rejoicing at his recovery) had been telephoned to the Vatican at once. So the sorrow for the death of a friend and helper was added to the other, and the prayers for his soul mingled with the entreaties that the Lord would restore peace to this distracted world.

When I returned home that day the front door was half shut (the Roman sign of a death), and the poor porter was half blind with weeping, in the entrance hall.

"Oh, the good kind man," he wailed; "never did he pass me without saying a pleasant word! He used actually to come and see what I was having for my dinner! And ten francs a month he gave me—besides all the *mancias* I got from the ecclesiastics who came to see him! What an evil world we live in, *Signora mia!*"

Even the misfortunes, however, take on a grim humour occasionally. There are certain individuals whom bad luck hits so constantly and ingeniously that they can almost laugh at it themselves. One such is our washer-woman, "Nannina Disgraziata," as the neighbours call her. She is a tall, beautifully built young woman, vividly recalling in face and figure a person of a very different race and class—Lady Paget, when she flashed on Rome at the height of her bloom in the early seventies. Nannina is a *minente* of Rome, one of the women of the peo-

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ple, whose pride it is never to cover their heads except in church. She is only twenty-seven; her first husband was stabbed, and died leaving her with two small children. She promptly married a second, a tramcar conductor, who adored her, but who, before a year was out, got himself run over by a car going at full speed and was brought home in little pieces. Her child was born after his death, and a kind-hearted lawyer took up the case and got an award for a big indemnity for Nannina and her son, of which, however (now ten months later), she has not been able to wrench a single franc from the company. I am afraid it has begun to find out something of what we all suspected concerning the unhappy conductor's end. For alas, he had not always run straight; there was another woman in the background, to whom, before he married our Nannina, he gave five hundred francs to disappear from Rome and go to live in the north of Italy. She took the money, of course, and then tried to blackmail him, and Nannina, a fiery young creature, on learning of her existence and her story, let fly at the man in good jealous Roman fashion. Between the two of them the poor wretch led such a miserable existence that he decided to end it by throwing himself under a car.

Then Nannina, finding herself reduced to terrible straits with three children to maintain by the only trade she knows, gave way to bitter resentment, and as she came

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and went with the heavy bundles of washing on her head, began to curse his memory. Widows must never do that. About six months ago the poor ghost appeared to her in a dream and reproached her with her cruelty. "You must cease from cursing me," he said. "I know all about it and it makes me suffer more in the place where I am. I have come to tell you something else too. That woman has a *cambiale* (note of hand) for five hundred francs which are due to me. Go to her and get it from her. The money will help you and the children."

Now Nannina had never known anything about such a note, but the dream was so vivid that she resolved to find out. So she went to the house of the woman in question and demanded boldly that the *cambiale* should be given up to her. The woman stared at her incredulously. "Who told you about it?" she asked. "The thing was a secret!"

"Never mind who told me," said Nannina; "you fetch it out and give it to me."

"That I will never do," the other replied furiously. "I have it and I am going to keep it, and don't you come near me again, you wicked creature, who drove my poor Agostino to kill himself by your abominable jealousy! I am glad you are in trouble. You stole him from me and sent him to his death, and you are getting a part of what you deserve!"

Nannina, in describing the scene, went on to explain

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quite naïvely that she had “unfortunately forgotten to take her knife with her,” so at this point she beat a retreat.

A day or two later as she was standing at the fountain in the courtyard, her arms in the water, her enemy appeared, to finish all that had been left unsaid at their former meeting; she threatened the widow with a painful death if she ever set eyes on her again, got hold of her arm and nearly wrenched it off and then, frightened by the approach of some other person, fled away. Nannina, again, as she says, “caught without a weapon,” collapsed after the woman had gone, and came to us, white and trembling, more with rage than fear, to tell us all about it. Having been advised to report her enemy’s threats to the police, she did so, and they were both called up before a magistrate the next day. I am sorry I missed that scene. It must have been dramatic!

But not only big misfortunes hurl themselves at poor “Nannina Disgraziata”; little ones follow one another in regular succession. The eldest child broke his arm and then his leg; the next one fell into the brazier and got badly burned; the baby, poor mite, had fever for months, pined away, got diphtheria and lived with a tube in its throat for I don’t know how long; Nannina had a *tante à héritage* who sent for her to attend her deathbed; by the time Nannina reached the distant village the old lady was dead and the envious relations had emptied the dower



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chest of its big store of linen and silver and the three rows of coral which were to have been Nannina's. Her first husband left her a house in that village—the earthquake of the 13th of January this year split it from top to bottom.

A third marriage was proposed to her during her visit home. Her mother entreated her to listen to the addresses of a certain *buon giovane* who had some money, was madly in love with her, and who “would certainly make an excellent husband.”

“*Mamma mia,*” said Nannina, “if you think it a pity such a rare thing should be wasted, take him yourself! I have had all the husbands I want, and as for children—I don't see the hour to wean this baby and get one good night's rest! No more for *me!*”

When her calamities give her time to bring the washing home—once in three or four weeks, but one must be patient about that—Nannina walks up and down the kitchen recounting her newest misfortune with tears that always end in a laugh. Her proud young face is beautiful either way, her figure one that would fetch a fortune could figures be bought like frocks; her brown eyes are full of light and fun when she stops crying, and although she has lost most of her clients (for the Romans seem to have renounced clean clothes with other luxuries in these hard times), she always goes away with a smile, saying, “*Domine Dio* knows best—I shall have better luck soon!”

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And my old cook shrugs her shoulders and says, “Nanina is a fool! She will go on living in that unlucky house. *I* saw it directly she went into it—I can tell in a minute whether a house is lucky or unlucky. It is a pity it didn’t tumble down in the earthquake. Then she would have *had* to move, and all her troubles would be over by this time!”

## Chapter Two

"SEPTEMBER, 1914"

**T**HE history of the last few weeks has been so vital to humanity, so fraught with emotion that even those of us who can count this the fourth pontificate we have seen feel that the past pales before the present, for we have sorrowed and rejoiced as we shall scarcely sorrow or rejoice again in this mortal life. It is as if we ourselves had gone down into the grave with death and ourselves risen with resurrection. But it was only in seeming. Never in all the ages has it been made more gloriously manifest that the Spouse of Christ, the Church, is as truly immortal militant on earth as she is triumphant in Heaven. Not for an instant has her life failed to pulse in harmony with His Who gave it, and the very profundity of her grief has been also the measure of her joy. When the gentle heart of Pius X, broken with the horrors of the War, ceased to beat, we, his weeping children, felt as if the great Mother who carries us all had but changed us to her other arm and bidden us lie still for a little, till she should show us the joy that cometh in the morning, the miracle of sunrise again after this dark and terrible night. And, like frightened children, we lay, trembling unreasonably, while there came



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to our ears the mourning of nations, the tramp of unnumbered thousands coming to weep with us over their father's bier.

But even in those first hours of bereavement, through all the tolling of the bells and the lamentations of the people, there sounded the fine faint call of the Church to arms; it rang louder and clearer than the trumpets on the seething battlefields; and when her princes arose to answer the summons, the warring nations stood aside and made way for the ambassadors of God. From England and America, from France and Germany, from martyred Belgium and nascent Poland, from all the countries of the earth, they came in peace across the blood-soaked lands to pray and legislate for peace and to discern the finger of God pointing out him who, elected in the very throes of war, with the thunder of the cannon booming through the *Te Deums*, is already named by his people "Il Pontefice della Pace," the Pontiff of Peace.

On the twentieth of August Pius X lay calm and majestic in death, while a never ceasing stream of mourners passed to look their last on him whom the poorest could not outdo in humility, whom the most wretched could always approach with confidence. On the third of September, amid such acclamations as never surely rang up to the dome before, Benedict XV, the Pope elect, stepped out on to the balcony to the right of the high altar in St. Peter's and gave his first blessing to the serried

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mass of humanity that represented the Christian world. His fine pale face was illuminated with extraordinary light, his dark eyes saw it all through tears. After he had given the blessing, he leaned far over and stretched out his arms to the people in an all-enfolding gesture of fatherly tenderness. We knew that we were orphans no longer.

Giacomo Della Chiesa, the man whose name was not once mentioned among those of the *Papabili* (probably eligible) Cardinals, was being fitted through many a long and arduous year, in what we may call Heaven's private school, for the overwhelming burdens now laid upon him. Since the divine will has been made clear in his regard, it seems strange that the indications of it should have been overlooked in the carefully balanced calculations of all concerned. Only one person, so far as we know, seems to have had a prevision of the possible issue, and, as he was far from the scene of action, his thoughts were only divulged to one other, our present Pope himself. Before the Cardinal's departure from Bologna to join the conclave, a certain monsignore of that city requested an audience to confer with him on some ecclesiastical matter. When taking his leave he expressed the hope that if his Superior were not to return to Bologna he might soon have the privilege of another private audience—in the Vatican!

The Cardinal replied, with an amused smile, "Set your

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mind at rest on that point, my dear friend. You will see your Archbishop again and have many another long talk with him."

To which the Monsignore rejoined, "Who knows but the Lord intends to give His Church a Benedict the Fifteenth?"

The fact that the last Benedict had been the Archbishop of Bologna before his elevation to the Papacy would naturally suggest that a successor in the Pastorate would, on mounting the throne, assume the name of his great predecessor, Prospero Lambertini, known to history as Benedict XIV. He, too, began his reign in troublous times (1740) and had the satisfaction of reconciling bitter enemies, of composing many thorny political questions with great success, while governing the Church so wisely and well that Italian historians do not hesitate to call him the greatest Pope of modern times. He was as learned as he was holy, of a quick bright spirit and a most incisive humour. He was never accused of undue ambition, but from his earliest youth he had the conviction that he was destined for the Papacy, and now and then some sudden flash would reveal his prophetic aspirations to his companions. Once, with some other youths, he had made a pleasure trip to Genoa. The party proposed to return to Rome by sea, but the idea did not appeal to young Lambertini, and he refused, saying, "Take any road you like, since you have nothing to lose—but for

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me, since I am to be Pope, it is not fitting that I should trust Cæsar and his fortunes to the mercy of the waves!"

After the death of Clement XIV the Conclave found it almost impossible to agree on the nomination of his successor, and at last Cardinal Lambertini, with his usual smiling good humour, remarked, "If you want a saint, take Gatti; if a politician, Aldovrandi; but if merely a good man—take me!"

Very great was the exultation in Bologna when at noon on the third of September the news flashed along the wires that its own Archbishop had been elected. The learned, beautiful city was thrown into a tumult of joy, the lower classes giving voice to their delight with wild enthusiasm. The first person who brought the announcement to a near relation of the new Pontiff was the family laundress, who had just descended the stairs of the palazzo with a big basket of washing on her head. Some one came rushing by, shouting, "*Della Chiesa Papa! Il nostro Arcivescovo Papa!*" The good woman pitched her basket down in the street and tore back up the stairs, burst into the room where the head of the family, being indisposed, was still in bed, and, throwing her arms up in the air, very nearly gave him a fit by screaming, "They have made him Pope! They have made him Pope!"



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In a few minutes the whole town was decked with flags, the bands were parading the streets, playing the gayest airs imaginable, and the residence of the new Pope's relatives was besieged by a crowd of congratulating visitors. Although the family of Giacomo Della Chiesa belongs to the Genoese nobility, Bologna claims him for her own by virtue of his having been her Archbishop for the past seven years. During that time he has so endeared himself to his flock that, but for the knowledge that their loss is the whole world's gain, they would have protested bitterly at parting with him. And the affection is mutual. His first thought after the great hour of the election was for them; his loving message and his first Pontifical blessing were instantly telegraphed to Bologna; and at the end of the tremendous day, when, worn out with fatigue and emotion, he was persuaded to cease receiving the thousands who streamed into his apartment at the Vatican to offer their congratulations, the doors, closed for the night, were reopened at his command to admit a little company of his beloved Bolognesi, with whom he talked long and affectionately.

In looking back over the days that elapsed between the death of Pius X and the election of his successor, it is interesting to note the air of certainty with which all the mistaken forecasts were made. It goes without saying that the religious aspect of the question, so far as it concerned the personal characters of the Cardinals desig-

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nated, was so completely taken for granted that it was not even touched upon in public comment. God be praised, every member of the Sacred College bears an invulnerable reputation for faith and morals, and the Papacy, in these days, is more dreaded than desired, so that personal ambition has very little place in the deliberations, from which, indeed, Pius X of glorious memory had done his utmost to banish the elements of political intrigue in the choice of his successor. There is not the slightest doubt that the electors were all inspired by the purest desire to choose the man who, from every point of view, should be best fitted to fulfil the duties of the exalted post at this unspeakably critical moment; and, be it said in passing, it redounds strikingly to the credit of the Sacred College that so many of the *Eminentissimi* were suggested as satisfactory candidates.

It is interesting now to run over the portraits and records published by the newspapers at the time the Conclave assembled, especially since even the most radical organs, during all those days, laid aside the question of politics and so closely followed the lines of the clerical and constitutional ones that, but for their titles, one would not have thought there was still a radical paper published in Rome. Without any wish to touch upon questions outside the scope of this sketch, I must say here that "clerical" and "constitutional," however far apart they may appear to stand, have, thanks to the labours of Pius

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X, during his eleven years' Pontificate, become in many ways almost interchangeable terms. It is clear to the dullest eye that here in Italy ecclesiastical authority is the best friend and supporter of constitutional monarchy, and that monarchy, wherever it has a free hand and can act independently of socialism, does its best to protect religious interests and to show respect for the Holy See. Together, the Executive at the Quirinal and the Spiritual Power at the Vatican form the “party” of law and order, which, as the termination of last summer's riots in Rome showed, will always triumph in the end by appealing to the inborn good sense of the masses, in this part of Italy at least.

The common people here have a saying, based on long experience of such events, to the effect that “he who enters the Conclave as Pope comes out—Cardinal!” Once more the truth of the adage has been vindicated. When the recent Conclave assembled the leading papers published portraits and short biographies of most of the members. Among these a very imperfect photograph of Cardinal Della Chiesa with a terse sketch of his career occupied a modest space at the foot of a page. Within the Vatican all the so-called “cells” were made as comfortable as circumstances would permit, from three to four rooms—necessary for the accommodation of the *Eminenza* himself, his *conclavista* or private chaplain, and his body servant—being included in a cell. Some sixty were



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prepared in all, the various prelates who have residence in the Vatican giving up their private apartments for the purpose. Some of these, as I can testify, are exceedingly cheery and habitable, but the cells which had to be improvised in the big offices can scarcely have appeared luxurious to men accustomed to the spacious stateliness of great episcopal palaces. To Cardinal Della Chiesa was assigned a lodging in one of the offices, looking out on the historic courtyard of San Damaso, and his cell bore the number fifty-seven. Every Cardinal was supplied, upon entering the Conclave, with a list of the cells and the names of their owners, as well as with a ground plan of the floor on which his own was situated, in order to facilitate the necessary visits and consultations. One reverend gentleman, a very near neighbour of mine, complained bitterly on returning home, of having been completely deprived of sleep by the loud and portentous striking of an enormous clock in his vicinity, and also of the suffocating heat from which he had suffered. His rooms apparently looked on the outer world, and the secrecy enforced during the days of deliberation forbade the opening of a single window, lest some signal should be conveyed to the eyes of the alert journalists watching day and night in the Square!

A little incident of Pius X's election comes back to me in this connection. Two friends of mine—one of them

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the beloved General Charette—were standing in the Piazza of St. Peter’s on that memorable day. The white smoke had gone up—the Pope was elected—but who was he? One or two of the officials appeared on the great balcony, and Charette, unable to contain his curiosity, called up to one he knew, “Who? Who? Tell us!”

The official could not speak; the due announcement of the *Gaudium Magnum* would be made soon, and he must be dumb till then; but he leant over the balcony, and, with truly Latin mastery of gesture, picked up a fold of his robe and imitated the action of sewing. That told all; the Pope’s name *Sarto* signifies tailor!

It says much for the severe honour of all concerned (and some hundreds of persons, from the *Eminenze* themselves down to the humblest of the attendants who ministered to their wants and guarded their privacy had had to take the oath of secrecy) that no true report leaked out once during those days of seclusion. Many false ones there were, but the only facts known were all based on anticipatory arithmetic. There was no censorship on opinions expressed before going into conclave, and those who thought they knew assured us that Cardinal Maffi was prime favourite, being secure of thirty votes beforehand, but that Cardinal Ferrata would run him very close. When one day followed another, and eight times the failure of the electors to agree had been denoted by

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the thick black smoke<sup>1</sup> issuing from the signal chimney of the Sistine Chapel, we knew for certain that Cardinal Maffi would not be elected, and the public fancy settled on one or another of the popular names—Serafino Vanutelli, Ferrata, the venerable and learned Gotti—but that of Della Chiesa was never mentioned.

There was one symptom of busy preoccupation which no precautions could entirely veil, and that was the long vigil held by the illustrious prisoners on the night of September the second. Even through the jealously closed blinds the lights in the apartments were visible to the watchers in the Piazza till an hour or two before dawn—a sign that the gravest consultations were taking place in the various cells. The choice must practically have been decided on by the time the lights were extinguished, although for some yet undisclosed reason the sitting of the next morning covered sufficient time for two votings to have taken place while it lasted.

We know now that there was a moment of thrilling tension when the thirty-ninth vote<sup>2</sup> for Cardinal Giacomo

<sup>1</sup> The electors write the names of their candidates on slips of paper, which, if no conclusion has been reached, are burnt together with a little straw; this emits a blackish smoke and thus informs the public of the fact. When the final verdict has been given the votes are burnt without the straw, the smoke rises white, and the watchers in the Piazza know that a Pope has been elected.

<sup>2</sup> Thirty-eight votes, representing two-thirds of the Cardinals assembled, were required, but since the seals concealing the voters' own names were not yet broken, and it was necessary formally to ascertain that the candidate had not voted for himself and thus nullified the sitting, the thirty-ninth vote was the one which indubitably proclaimed the election.

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Della Chiesa was read, and then a soft murmur of awe and admiration ran through the reverend assembly, for a beautiful thing happened. One broad glorious ray of sunshine broke suddenly through a window and rested on the Pope-elect alone, enveloping the slight figure on the canopied seat in a flood of dazzling gold. It was like Heaven's own seal on his election.

He rose, white and trembling, and went to kneel on the steps of the altar, his face buried in his hands. A bell summoned the masters of ceremonies and Prince Rospigliosi, the Marshal of the Conclave, who were waiting without. The Dean of the Sacred College, Cardinal Vannutelli, rose from his place, and they followed him to the altar, where he paused, and in a ringing voice put the great question: "Giacomo Della Chiesa, dost thou accept thy election to the Supreme Pontificate, now canonically made?"

A deathlike silence prevailed. The reverend heads, so many of them white with years, were bent forward to catch the answer. From far above, in the splendid gloom of the vault, the great figures of Michelangelo seemed to turn from the tremendous drama of the Creation, the Fall, the Last Judgment, to contemplate the kneeling figure and bowed head of the man on whom the care for the weal of Christendom was about to be laid. Still he was silent, praying and trembling.

Suddenly he raised his head. With the exhortation of



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Pius X to his successor in his mind—the solemn exhortation to accept unhesitatingly the charge laid upon him—Giacomo Della Chiesa replied in the dead Pope's own words, but in a voice barely audible from emotion, "I will not oppose the will of God."

"And what name wilt thou take?"<sup>1</sup> asked the Dean.

"Benedict the Fifteenth," was the reply.

Instantly and as if by magic the canopies over all the Cardinals' seats were lowered by the attendants, only that of the Pope-elect being left in place. The great act was completed. The Church had her two hundred and sixtieth Pontiff.

And what manner of man, humanly speaking, is he whom God has chosen at this time to rule over His flock? Suddenly presented to us in the "fierce light that beats upon a throne," his individuality, no less than the record of his past life, becomes of supreme interest to Catholics all over the world. Physically he is small and slightly built, pale and somewhat delicate in appearance; but it is the delicacy of a fine, well-tempered organisation, in which the nervous, highly trained elasticity of the body is the ever ready ally of the active, all-embracing mind. When our new Pope was led into the Sacristy of the Sis-

<sup>1</sup> The Pontiffs kept their own names on assuming the Papacy until, in the ninth century, one was elected who had been baptised Peter. His humility forbade him to bear the name of the Prince of the Apostles, and he chose for himself that of Sergius (Sergius II, 844) since when the custom of taking a new name has prevailed.

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tine to be robed in the Pontifical vestments for the first time, it was found that even the smallest of the three sets of garments always provided on these occasions was over large for him, embarrassingly long and wide. They had to serve through all the first ceremonies of the eventful day, but as soon as the Pope retired to his own apartments for a short rest, the tailor was summoned to make the necessary alterations as quickly as possible.

While the good man was pinning folds and shortening hems, the Holy Father said smilingly, “You left me out of your calculations, my son, did you not?”

“Oh, *Santo Padre*,” the tailor cried in self-defence, “remember, it was only in May that I made you your Cardinal’s robes!”

Benedict XV was not offended at this allusion to the marked delay of an honour to which he would have attained very much earlier but for prudential reasons based on his long and close connection with the political activities of the lamented Cardinal Rampolla. The good *sarto* was then and there confirmed in his appointment of ecclesiastical tailor to the Vatican.

All the records of Giacomo Della Chiesa’s past life confirm the impression of an unusually strong and consistent character, saved from hardness by warm affections and true spirituality. Born in November, 1854, he is not quite sixty, and that is considered nowadays daringly young for the Papacy. Those addicted to prophecy had



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assured us that, since the exciting and terrible events through which we are passing will necessitate the initiation of a completely fresh policy at their close, the Cardinals would be likely to elect a very aged member of their College, who, in the natural course of things, could be expected to show his tact by passing away at the fitting moment and leaving the field open to some young and vigorous successor, who (for the lay prophet loveth the sound of his prophecy) would enter it unhampered by conditions or compromises made under the harassing pressure of the war.

In looking at the calm and beautiful face of Cardinal Gotti, smooth and round in spite of his eighty years—sixty-five of them passed in the active service of God—one seems to detect the smile of indulgent irony with which he heard his own name pronounced by the augurs as the one most satisfactory in this respect to their funnily shortsighted calculations!

Benedict XV would have wished to follow his senior's example in so early dedicating himself to the Church. He was only thirteen, his brother tells us, when he came to his father and requested permission to do so. The Marchese Della Chiesa wished to see his son distinguish himself in the world, but he had no intention of opposing the decrees of Heaven should these be made manifest. So he replied, "What you have to do now is to study. You have plenty of time before you. When you have taken

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your degree in jurisprudence we will talk of this matter again.”

The boy obeyed, and spoke no word of his heart's desire for several years. In 1875 he once more came to his father, and said, “*Babbo*, I am now a qualified lawyer. I ask that my old wish may be granted.”

There was no more hesitation after that; the call was clear and was instantly obeyed.

The family name of the Marchese Della Chiesa had its origin, the Lombard chroniclers tell us, in the days when St. Ambrose, the great Bishop of Milan, found it necessary to institute an order of devout warriors for the defence of the Church against the attacks and devastations of the Arian heretics. Among the noble Milanese who were honoured with this charge there were some who proudly called themselves “*Campioni della Chiesa*,” “*Champions of the Church*” from which time the name Della Chiesa began to be applied to their descendants. These were numerous, and spread themselves rapidly through the north of Italy and also on the other side of the Alps. They came to great wealth and glory, owning many towns and strongholds, particularly in the region around Genoa, in which city they were formally made members of one of those curious leagues by which three or four illustrious families bound themselves to stand together through thick and thin, to sustain their own power and that of the “*superb*” republic.

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It is from the Genoese branch of the Della Chieras that Benedict XV is descended. Through the fifteen hundred years or so that the family has existed (only Biblical genealogies can vie with Italian ones for antiquity), it has kept its place in the forefront of Ligurian nobility, fighting, navigating, governing, praying, as if it had been untouched by the thousand wars and vicissitudes which have swept over the lovely land that was its birthplace. Among its many chiefs and warriors shine forth the gentle figures of two saints, John the Bishop of Como, and Anthony of the Order of Friars Preachers. It counts four Bishops and one Cardinal before our present Pope attained to that rank, but on the whole it has furnished more loyal laymen and fewer ecclesiastics to the world than most families of its class in Italy.

The inherited qualities of so many brave soldiers and sailors and civic governors seem to have had a large share in endowing the character and temperament of their latest and most illustrious descendant, and these were doubtless accentuated by an environment which, during his childhood and youth, so vividly recalled their faith and valour. We moderns of other countries can scarcely comprehend the influence of such surroundings on young and ardent minds. Restless and wandering, most of us landless as the birds of the air, we were never told by our parents, "Here, so many hundred years ago, your namesake and ancestor fought a good fight for his country.

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Here another prayed and wrought miracles a thousand years before you were born. Here a noble lady nursed and tended the plague-stricken forebears of your own tenants and laid down her life in the task. Remember—and imitate!” It all tells in the battle of life!

Benedict XV was born at Genoa, and the certificate of his baptism sets forth that, as he was not expected to live, he was baptised in his parents' house. The frail infant, according to the good old Italian custom, was confided to a peasant woman to nurse in the pure country air and amid simple surroundings for the first two or three years of his life. So he grew up strong and healthy, although always slight in build, and very quiet and thoughtful in his ways. His mother, they say, idolised him, but hers was a wise and holy love which fostered reverently all the noble sides of his character. What humanity owes to good mothers let the lives of the Saints bear witness! The Marchesa Della Chiesa herself came of a great line, the Sulmonas of Abruzzi, who furnished a pontiff to the Church in the person of Cosimo Migliorati, known to history as Innocent VII. True to Genoese traditions, many sons of the Della Chiasas have followed the sea; the elder brother of the new Pope is an admiral, and the younger one is also in the navy. The family lived chiefly on the Marchese's estate at Pegli, and the beautiful little port claims Giacomo for her own, so much of his childhood and youth having been passed



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there before his parents removed to Rome, where, after four years of theological studies, he was ordained, in 1879.

The Admiral and his wife still reside at Pegli, and the place, like Bologna, went mad with joy when he received the announcement of his brother's election. The war had emptied it of its usual crowd of summer visitors, but the people from all the country round trooped in when the tidings spread, and in an incredibly short time the town was *en fête*, flags floating from all the buildings, friends flocking to offer their congratulations to the family, while the boats in the harbour shook out signals of triumph. That night the illuminations were visible from far out at sea, for there was scarcely a window that was not brilliant with lamps and torches.

So this was whither he was tending during the long quiet years of growth and mental development, years which never saw him swerve from his set ideal. Many stories are told of his quaint, obstinate, yet gentle ways. As a boy his chief friend and companion was Carlo Montalto, the son of a wealthy tenant of the Della Chiesas. Carlo still calls him the master, but the tie between them seems always to have been one of perfect trust and equality. Carlo says that Giacomo showed one trait which greatly puzzled his playfellows. In the midst of the wildest game he would suddenly halt, as if a hand had been laid on his shoulder, and without a word turn and



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run for the house, shut himself up in his study, and begin to work as if his life depended on it. Only once did he speak to his friend of his ambition to become a priest, saying sorrowfully that he must satisfy his father by taking a lawyer's degree first. He could not realise then the value that the study of rhetoric and legal procedure was to be to him in the final fulfilment of his design. This was so dominant in his mind that in his moments of recreation he used to place himself at his window that looked out upon the sea, and, as from a pulpit, address long and impassioned sermons to the passing clouds, the waves and the sky. Carlo, crouching below in the garden, listened awe-struck to these orations; he says that the boy's voice was so strong and resonant that he could hear it above the wildest of the storms that sweep that coast, but he adds humbly, "I never understood what he was saying—I suppose he preached too well!"

At one time the Marchesa perceived that her son's health was beginning to suffer from his passion for study, and, ruthlessly confiscating all his books, she gave him a spade and told him to go and work in the garden. An order was an order; Giacomo went to work with all his might, and one result of his labour still survives in the shape of a beautiful palm which he planted then, and which, fit emblem of his own life, has taken on great and noble proportions. He loves the palm as if it were a living creature. Through all these years, on every occasion when

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he has visited Pegli, he has asked how it throve, before putting any other question, and he has stood, looking long at it, touching its emerald foliage and seeming to talk to it under his breath. His visits to Carlo did not cease after he was made Archbishop of Bologna in 1907; indeed, he seemed to find it a great solace to sit for hours in the Montalto farmhouse, conversing with the friend of his childhood, and as often as not partaking of the family's simple fare. His last visit took place in May of the present year, after he became a cardinal. He stayed to dinner and laughed heartily when the master of the house reminded him of the days when the thick black smoke issuing from the farm chimney and visible from the villa windows denoted that the good wife was cooking *polenta*, and the young Marchese would catch one of the children and send over a request for his share of the national dish, "fried to a turn!"

But it is the more mature existence of him who is now our spiritual ruler which repays contemplation for those who have the philosopher's habit of tracing cause and effect. As a simple priest he led the ascetic life which harmonises so well with the traditions of Pius IX, Leo XIII, and Pius X, at the Vatican. Occupying a very modest apartment in an old-fashioned quarter of Rome, he

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was in the habit of issuing at early dawn to say his Mass in the Church of Sant' Eusebio near by; his robes were worn till they were shabby, and he might have passed for one of the poorest priests in the town; but the poor knew better—his generosity refused them nothing, and although he had abundant means, he made many self-sacrifices in order to increase his charities. Early singled out for his great learning and intelligence, he began what we may call his diplomatic training as an assistant under-secretary in the Papal Ministry for Foreign Affairs, of which the head at that time was Monsignor Mariano Rampolla, afterwards Cardinal, the man who, but for the now defunct right of veto of the Austrian Emperor, would have been the next Pope after Leo XIII.

At once a strong attachment grew up between the two men; Della Chiesa became Rampolla's right hand, and the senior reposed complete and well-merited trust in his junior. When Monsignor Rampolla went to Madrid as Nuncio, Della Chiesa accompanied him as Secretary of Legation, and with him returned to Rome in 1887, when the Monsignor was made a cardinal. On assuming the elevated post of Secretary of State, Rampolla once more called the younger man to his side, and under his leadership Monsignor Della Chiesa, as he then was, went through all the phases of promotion until he rose to the post of Under-Secretary of State and Secretary of the Seals, which he held during the reign of Leo XIII, dur-

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ing the vacancy, and during the first part of the reign of Pius X. All this time he was scrupulously fulfilling all the sacred duties of the priesthood, setting an example which won for him unstinted respect and admiration, and also affection, although the latter, except in the case of lifelong friends, was undoubtedly qualified with a tinge of fear. A certain ascetic aloofness, the outcome of a crystalline honest nature that would have nought to do with compromises, was apparent enough to call forth Pius X's remark, "A good man, holy and wise—but not exactly companionable!"

When Monsignor Della Chiesa was made Archbishop of Bologna this uncompromising character created apprehension among the clergy of the beautiful sleepy old city, and the apprehensions were fully justified by the reforms he initiated and insisted on carrying out. In ordinary parlance, everything was to be "just so," and no inexactness would be tolerated for a moment.

"But, Monsignore," the good parish priests protested, "things have always been done thus in the past, and have suited everybody. Why change them now?"

"The past is not our business, and the present is," was the Archbishop's reply. "Let that suffice!"

The condition of some of the churches did not come up to his idea of how God's house should be kept. The war on dust and dirt which has resulted in the great cleanliness of the churches in Rome was carried by him into his



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diocese the moment he took possession of it. He inspected, gave his orders—and then enforced them by saying, in his most alarming voice, “And now woe to you if I ever find a church that is not clean!”

The clergy of the Archdiocese of Bologna have never been reproached with laxity, but the Archbishop instituted a discipline that, while calling forth some murmurs of protest, has raised it to a very high standard of exactness and zeal. To one class, however, he has always been the kindest and most indulgent of friends. The poor and distressed could always approach him, and never came away without having been helped and consoled. He found that his servants, their heads a little turned, perhaps, by their master’s new dignity, would keep poor petitioners waiting for hours in the anteroom before admitting them to his presence. The master’s wrath flamed out. “How dare you treat these good people so?” he thundered.

“But Monsignore—we thought—”

“You are not there to think!” exclaimed the Archbishop. “If you were hungry and destitute you would be as importunate as they. Never keep poor people waiting again!”

We must cite one more instance of the sympathy our new Holy Father can feel for those in trouble. There was a poor dancing-master in Bologna who had been earning his living in these hard times by teaching—the



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tango! The Archbishop condemned the dance; the Bolognese men and maidens respected the prohibition; and the tango teacher lost his custom in a day. Frantically he made his way to the palace and persuaded one of Monsignore's attendants to intercede for him. "*Eccellenza*, the man is desperate! He says you have deprived him of the means of earning his living—he entreats you to reconsider the matter!"

Monsignore shook his head. "I cannot do that," he said; "but you can give the poor fellow this." And he handed out two hundred francs.

Perhaps it is in little things in the unpremeditated actions of life that the heart is most truly shown. When Cardinal Rampolla, who had been all powerful for so many years, died in undeserved isolation borne with the most perfect resignation and humility, of all those whom he had protected and helped it is said that Cardinal Giacomo Della Chiesa was the only one who came, and that instantly, to kiss his hand as he lay in his coffin. On the day of his own election to the Papacy Benedict XV found time to make one nomination; the nephew of Pius X, Monsignor Giovanni Battista Pralin, was appointed a canon of the Vatican Basilica. Pius X of blessed memory left a will which brought tears to all eyes, the will of a saint: "I was born poor, I have lived poor, I wish to die poor. I beg that the Holy See will allow my sisters three hundred francs a month."

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In order that these venerated ladies should have every comfort that their age and standing demands, Benedict XV immediately raised the sum to one thousand francs (forty pounds) a month; those who know the simple self-denying lives led by the sisters of Pius X predict that the larger part of their allowance will be spent in charity. On his coronation day the new Pope set aside one hundred thousand francs to be distributed among the deserving poor of Rome, so that they too might share in the general joy.

The common people remembered one aspect of the Pontiff's future existence which had escaped the rest of us—the fact that from the moment of his election he would never set foot outside the limits of the Vatican again, a sacrifice of personal liberty very irksome to one who has hitherto been his own master. "But after all," they added, "the place is not strange to him. He knows it so well that it is like his own house."

It was not so with Pius X. He felt the restrictions keenly, and his health certainly suffered from the want of an occasional change to more bracing surroundings. He was determined to familiarise himself with his dwelling, however, and used to go wandering unattended through the huge building, very often losing his way in its intricacies. One day his explorations landed him in the kitchens, to the consternation of cooks and scullions, and to his own great distress, for he was horrified to learn

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that such a number of servants should be kept to minister to his humble wants. When he found his way back to his own apartments he sent for the major-domo of the Palace and asked if it was really necessary to keep and pay for such a staff. Surely it was out of all proportion to his simple way of life! But when it was explained to him that to diminish it suddenly would be to throw some good people out of work, he resigned himself in his own gentle way. Viewed from that standpoint the expense was excusable in his eyes.

The times being so big with trouble, Benedict XV decreed that his coronation should not take place in St. Peter's, but in the Sistine Chapel, with as little pomp and expense as possible. Yet the function lost none of its grandeur by being enacted in the more restricted space. The undying glory and beauty of the Church were triumphantly vindicated when Europe's noblest and holiest stood round that slight, gold-robed figure kneeling in absorbed prayer, with head bowed against the altar, while the sunshine of a Roman morning flooded the scene with incomparable radiance.

The last prayers, the last sighs of Pius X had been for peace. Cardinal Maffi, preaching in the Duomo at

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Bologna, told his hearers that at the beginning of the War the Pope had asked God to accept the sacrifice of his own life as an offering for the reconciliation of the conflicting nations. The war really killed him; his heart was broken and gave way at the onset of sickness. God called his servant to the everlasting peace, but he was not to see its counterpart on earth. His successor's first words were words of peace. On the eighth of September, the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, the Queen of Peace, he sent forth this ringing appeal:

“Benedict XV Pope

*“To the Catholics of the whole world:”*

“As soon as we were raised to the Chair of Peter, although conscious of our great unworthiness of such office, we adored with profound reverence the hidden counsels of Providence which had exalted our humble person to such a height of dignity. Although convinced of possessing no personal merit to inspire us with confidence to assume the administration of the Supreme Pontificate, we accepted it, reposing our faith on the divine Benignity, not doubting for a moment that He Who has laid upon us the heavy weight of that dignity will bestow also the help and strength necessary to sustain it.

“But scarcely had we turned our eyes to the flock entrusted to our care when we were thrilled with horror and filled with inexpressible bitterness at the sight of the

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War by which a great part of Europe has been devastated with fire and sword and deluged with Christian blood. Representing as we do the Good Shepherd in the government of the Church, it is our special duty to regard with tender and paternal love all the lambs and sheep of His flock. We should be, and indeed are, prepared and ready to follow the Lord's example and give up even our life for them, and we are firmly and deliberately resolved to use every means in our power to put an end to these calamities. Meanwhile, before even addressing encyclical letters to all the Bishops, according to the immemorial custom of Roman Pontiffs at the beginning of their Apostolate, we take up the last word of our dying predecessor, Pius X, of holy and immortal memory, the word inspired in him in the first moment of the War by his love and care for all mankind.

"Therefore while we ourself will raise our eyes and hands to God in supplication and prayer, we exhort, we adjure, even as he exhorted and adjured, all the children of the Church and most especially the priests, that they institute and persevere, by every means in their power, whether with private prayer or with public, solemn invocation, in entreaties to God, Arbiter and Master of all, that He would remember His mercies and stay the scourge of His wrath whereby He now asks account of the nations for their sins. In our united prayers may we have the assistance and protection of the Virgin Mother



## “SEPTEMBER, 1914”

of God, of Her Whose blessed Nativity we celebrate to-day and from Whom there shone upon weary humanity the Dayspring of Peace, since of Her was to be born Him in Whom the Eternal Father did reconcile all things, Whose Blood shed upon the Cross most truly brought peace for all, in Heaven and on earth.

“We therefore ardently implore and conjure those who govern the destinies of nations to forget their private discords in view of the welfare of humanity at large. Let them reflect that mortal life is already sufficiently full of misery and sorrow and that it is not for them to render it yet more wretched. Let them be satisfied with the ruin accomplished, with the human blood already shed. Let them hasten now to seek counsels of peace and proffer the hand of fellowship. Thus shall they win great merit in the sight of God, and honour from their own subjects, as well as the gratitude of the whole civilised world. And lastly, to us, who at the very commencement of our Apostolic Pastorship, are greatly harassed by the universal perturbations, they will render a most welcome service which with our whole heart we earnestly desire,

“BENEDICT XV, Pope.”

May that desire of our Holy Father's heart be speedily granted!

## Chapter Three

SANTA SUSANNA

I

**O**F all the fourteen *rioni*, or regions, into which Rome is divided, the first, called *Monti*, is yet to me the best loved and the most interesting, and I have always felt honoured in being one of its born children. The tide of modernism has swept over it since then; but the immortal landmarks stand yet, some dominating and tremendous, memorials of a time when the Roman Empire was the world; some still smiling in all the loveliness of the Renaissance, when earth's kingdoms indeed bowed to other rulers, but intellect and art still owned fealty to the Eternal City and all it represented.

The two dominions still guarded the quarter when I grew up there—rival silences reconciled at last, their ripe beauty, blending and harmonising in the golden peace of the long noondays, in the dark sapphire of the quiet nights. The breeze that came up from the south sang among the cypresses very gently, just swaying their delicate crowning spires, but without disturbing the massed foliage below or shifting a single grain of the fragrant dust that its falling had piled for centuries around their

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roots. These had struck so deep that it seemed as if earth could hold no more, and they had risen and spread above it in upstanding buttresses velveted with moss, between whose deep arms a child could creep in and lie for hours on the sifted gold-brown mould, watching the play of branches in the sun against the blue, a thousand miles overhead; dreaming of the great past that made itself felt all around, even to untutored senses; and of an enchanting future limited to the blooming of *the* moss rose-tree, whose whereabouts just then was the most wonderful secret in the world—one's own alone; or else of how many bunches of big dark purple violets could be smuggled upstairs in one's pinafore before the old gardener woke from his nap and came hobbling after one to snatch them away. For the gardener had illicit dealings with flower-sellers, through the scrolled iron-work of the gate that looked to St. Mary Major; and one of the chief joys of life was to outwit him, and pick armfuls of violets and hyacinths while he was asleep.

The most beautiful gate of all was the one to the right of the house—an immense decorated archway leading into the *piazzale* of the Villa, a vast round, ringed with cypresses, and delimited by stone pillars which stood in a semi-circle, with huge iron chains swinging low between. This was planned as a waiting-place for the coaches and sedan chairs after they had put down their freight at the foot of the state staircase, under the *porte-*

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*cochère*. They came out into the broad alley, peopled with statues, behind the house, turned to the left, and drew up in the *piazzale* to wait till their lordly masters and mistresses had ended their feasting upstairs. Then the gate would be opened: the Excellencies, all packed into their gilt coaches or crimson sedan chairs, would trundle through, perhaps throwing a little silver to the ragged crowd that had gathered outside. The pages, beautiful, mischievous young rascals, would loll in those rose-wreathed Belvederes on either side of the gate, making fun of the great people, while they nibbled the sweets they had stolen from the table, or hatched little hell-black perfidies with the shameless joy of their age and day.

And all the while, upstairs, perhaps, Vittoria Accoramboni, whom specialists in crime have called the worst woman that ever lived, was beginning to look round for some one to do away with poor Francesco Peretti, the Cardinal's nephew, who had been unlucky enough to espouse her, and who, being virtuous, bored her to death. She found her weapon and used it, to her own undoing; little dreaming that Francesco's cardinal uncle would one day become Pope and—remember. Yet I think it was not only personal vengeance that moved Sixtus V, the great purifier, in that affair. Vittoria dragged down the Orsinis in her fall; and when they had been suppressed and exiled, Rome had peace. As Cardinal Montalto, Sixtus had laid out the Villa, and rebuilt the Negroni Pal-

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ace for the young couple. Later it passed into the hands of the Massimos; and when my own memories of it begin, the great house was the property of perhaps the most decorous and pious noble family in all Rome; and the gardens, not a tree or shrub disturbed for three hundred years, were silent and peaceful as the grave.

In spite of its sad memories (for the poor young nephew had been dearly loved), Sixtus V cherished this high quarter of Rome, and set his mark upon it in one beautiful building after another; and his example was followed by later Popes. All these more modern potentates were but walking in the steps of greater builders of a greater day, when this region was the most fashionable and gorgeous quarter of imperial Rome. Much of it was covered by the Baths of Diocletian, the largest ever built and constituting a city within the city. It enclosed three of the Seven Hills, was covered with palaces, baths, and temples; and had, more distinctly than any of the other *rioni* except that of Borgo (Trastevere), a population of its own, which looked down on the citizens outside its borders as aliens and, very generally, foes. The immense remains of the ancient buildings had, I imagine, much to do with its popularity during the Renaissance; for they furnished abundant and beautiful material for the mere trouble of appropriating and using it. Why go farther afield, when marble and stone, bronze and carvings, lay piled high, so to speak, at one's own doorstep? The pillaging



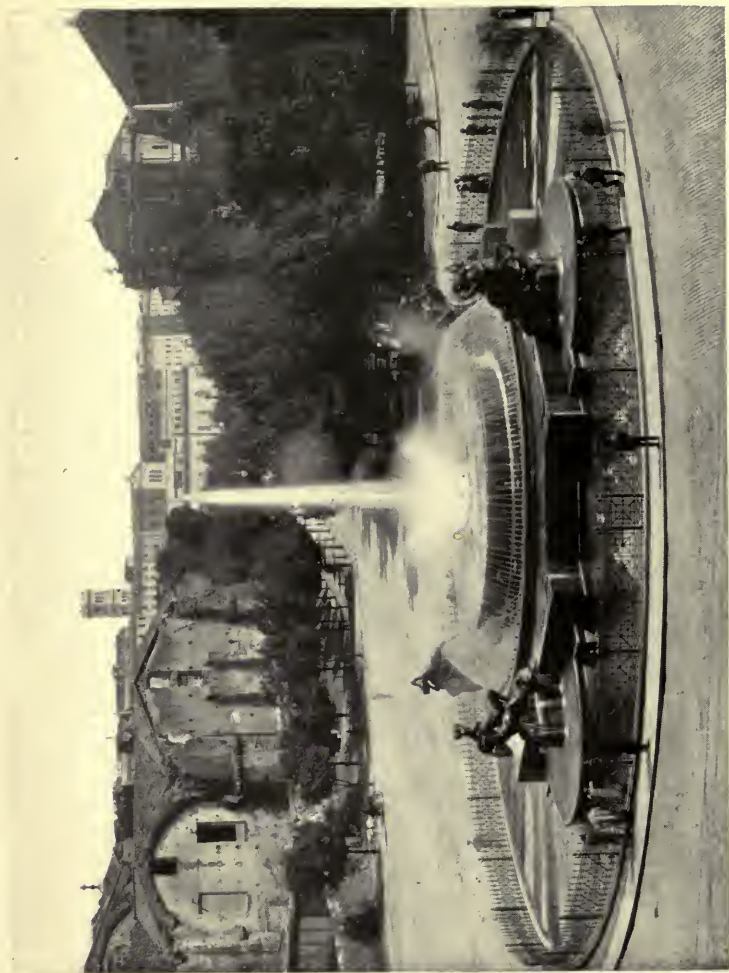
## STORIED ITALY.

amounted to devastation, it is true; but the results of it are singularly lovely, and some have been respected even by the reckless builders and planners of our own times.

Of all Sixtus V's achievements, the Church of Santa Susanna seems to me the most perfect—the one where his favourite architect, Carlo Maderna, did most justice to his patron and himself.

I must have passed the exquisite edifice almost daily in my childhood; yet it was only recently that I entered it for the first time. And, so doing, I was granted another of those mysteriously timed surprises in which my life has been so rich—the moments, marking epochs, that brought me the “Perfume of the Rainbow” on a summer morning in China, the return of the North Star to my horizon in mid-Atlantic, the blooming of a lily at dawn in Japan, a vision of Arctic glory in the Rockies—supreme revelations of beauty, each a matchless gem to hang on memory's rosary.

Perfection is perceived only by force of contrast: Santa Susanna saw to it that this should serve her when I came to the church built over her dwelling, where her sainted body lies. Outside, in the broad Piazza of San Bernardo, an impassioned orator was declaiming to a crowd on the merits of a candidate for the municipal elections; tram-cars raced and rattled in the blazing sunshine; motors, with unearthly yells, seared their way through groups of terrified citizens. And, alas! the jug-



NEW FOUNTAIN ON PIAZZA DELLE TERME, ROME, WITH THE BATHS  
OF DIOCLETIAN ON THE LEFT



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gernaut motor screams more discordantly and races more callously in our poor Rome to-day than in any city in the world. A sunburned *contadina*, with a couple of emaciated children hanging to her skirts, was trying to sell faded carnations at two *sous* the bunch. The great fountain with its pompous superstructure, the only unchanged feature of the scene, poured forth its flood of crystal even as it did when I was born within sound of it; but the colossal Moses, who always looked so angry, appears now to be calling down Heaven's wrath on the desecrated piazza.

The mild, faithful lions, though each gives from his mouth the old generous stream, seem to be gazing mournfully at the noisy pageant of vulgar life—regretting the wide, sunny calm of old, and waiting, none too patiently, for some cataclysm of nature to overwhelm it and restore a peace which has fled forever—though the lions do not know that. Your great Sixtus, the fifth of the name, has been dead these three hundred years and more—poor lions!—and his very name is growing dim on the architrave of the monument. The splendid material beauty he loved and cherished is all but gone; only a trace remains here and there. It seemed to me to-day that I, and the lions, and the tanned *contadina* who dipped her wilting flowers in his fountain were the last links left in the thin, thin chain with the past. And then I mounted a few worn marble steps and passed through a half-open

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door—and the past, with its silences and its peace, took me to its heart and said, “I am immortal, and I am here!”

What space and soaring quiet in that vast, dim church! What exquisitely balanced distance between porch and altar! What room for wings between marble floor and sombre glory overhead! The first impression is all of dear, deathly, restful emptiness. Featureless, unbroken as the sea at twilight, the vast sweep goes from your first footfall across the threshold to the mysterious confessional at the far end, with its double stairway which descends to a dark, closed sanctuary—the resting-place of the Saint. From far above, one lamp hangs and burns; for behind there, at the farthest point of the raised choir, which is a church in itself, is the tabernacle, lonely and withdrawn, from which the Sacred Heart calls night and day to Its careless common children to come and be loved.

Only one chapel is there in this church of unities—a high, wide chapel to the right, opened out, as if Our Lord had gently reproached the architect for not providing a lodging for the Mother without whom He would not come to us, without whom He will not stay. There is a picture of the Blessed One, crowned and gemmed, black with the incense of centuries; yet so dominant, so love-inspiring, that, even as I was standing, awed, on the far edge of that twilight sea of space, two women in deepest mourning were kneeling before it in a rapture of



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love, holding out their arms as children do to the mother who calls them. And when they rose and passed me to go out, their tear-marked pale faces were aflame with holy joy.

Next door to the church, in one of the architectural wings on which it seems to rest on either side, is a tall old doorway, arched and massive, through which I have occasionally caught glimpses of a garden court, dappled with gold-green shadows. The portal stood half open as I passed to-day, and I could not resist the temptation of entering what I took for some religious precinct, since an inscription on the door itself ran "Congregazione Mariana"; and on Sundays I had seen many persons going in and out. But there was nothing ecclesiastical about what I found within. A white-haired woman, with the stern, handsome features of some dame of old Rome, sat sewing in the deep, embowered court; and beside her, looking eagerly up into her face, was a little girl of twelve or so, pale as a lily, with big dark eyes and an expression of intense seriousness.

Behind and around them rose the brown background of ancient wall, wreathed and canopied overhead by a broad-spreading vine. Little balconies jutted into the courtyard, far above one's head, spilling over great hanging mantles of the pink geranium which has become so popular with our flower-loving people. All was bathed in mellow gloom—the clear evening light seeming to sink

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and rest lovingly on every rich old tint and softly swinging flower.

"May I come in?" I asked rather timidly, conscious now that I had intruded on a private dwelling.

The old lady merely bowed her head in consent and went on with her sewing, but the child sprang up and came toward me.

"*Favorisca, Signora!*" she said, her face lighting up with interest at the sight of a stranger.

Then some one spoke at my elbow:

"There is little to see here—a mere rustic scene, picturesque but uninteresting. Would you like to come into the church? There indeed I can show you something worth seeing."

It was an elderly man, the father of the little maid and the official sacristan. I realised that this was the man I had been looking for for days past, and in five minutes we were friends for life. So far, the guardians of the beautiful church had been invisible when I entered it; all doors except the principal entrance had remained tightly closed; and I was beginning to despair of finding any one to open the locked confessional under the high altar, and answer all the questions I was burning to put. As soon as the good man discovered that I was of his own generation and a born Roman, he opened his heart to me, enlarging on the great old times that we could both remember, when literally the only houses in this bit of

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the town were all religious ones, and an unbroken chain of convents and monasteries stretched from the Via di Santa Susanna to the Quirinal Palace on one side, and the Palazzo della Consulta on the other.

“And the last of all these, near Piazza Monte Cavallo,” he wound up, “was the convent of the Sacramentine nuns—they of the Perpetual Adoration. And what do you think, *Signora*? When this government took possession and turned them all out and made the convents into barracks, did not I, whose levy was of the year 1850, have to go to that very convent of the Sacramentine to pass the military inspection! *Che destino, eh?* And there, too, I did a part of my time as a soldier. It was enough to break one’s heart. There are no nuns left except a few Cistercians, hidden away in a little bit of their old house that the government left them here behind the church. Oh, such good, clever ladies, so instructed and so holy! The rest is all full of cuirassiers. Your Excellency will have heard them if you live near by?”

“Heard them?” Poor boys, I should think I had! The back garden of my house has a boundary wall which is also that of their exercising ground. They are gentle, orderly fellows, and on Sundays they and their officers crowd devoutly to Mass; but their bugles wake me at dawn, practise all day, and drown me in melancholy when they play “Last Call” at night. We can live down every trace of our tragedies, as we think; but there are

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two weapons by which they can stab us for a hundred years. The scent of nasturtiums and the wail of a bugle would make me weep in my grave.

"Let us go into the church, friend," I said.

The light was failing, and I was not sure that this kind fellow-ghost would appear to me again. He probably belonged only to the sunset hour. So we moved on, the white-clad little girl running back to find the keys. In a moment we had entered the great, calm sanctuary; and again I had the impression of moving over the surface of a twilight sea, while overhead the last gleams of the sunset lingered and fretted the broken gold of the vault.

## II

The walls of the nave of the church are frescoed with the story of "Susanna la Casta," of Old-Testament fame; and, though too far removed from modern standards to be noticed at all by present-day art critics, are beautiful in their wide washes of delicate colour and their fidelity both to human nature and to the spirit of the story. Baldassare Croce painted them, and took joyful advantage of the spacious surfaces to place his groups in surroundings of noble architecture more germane to his own day than to that of Susanna. The first and the last scenes of the drama are particularly fine. It is not

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the usual naked coquette who sits by the fountain bath, but a gloriously angry wife and mother, drawing closer—the draperies she had not yet discarded, and showing in every line of noble face and flashing eyes her scorn of the senile debauchees, who, one kneeling and one standing close to her, pour forth their passion in her outraged ears.

Then come the calumny, the sentence, the mourning; horrified family and fellow-citizens accompanying her to death—some believing in her still; some, as men and women will, shaking their heads over the instability of eminent virtue. One seems to hear the lament of the “Imitation”: “I have seen the pillars crumble and the stars fall from heaven.” And then the deliverance. In the one short hour that has passed since the accusation, Susanna seems to have been lifted away from earthly terrors and resentments. Unconscious of the rejoicings around her, unconscious of the sentence being even then carried out on her accusers, she stands awed and transfigured on the temple steps, thanking the God of her fathers for His inscrutable and adorable judgments.

Her story was painted here for two reasons—the first, because her name is the same as that of Diocletian’s girl-martyr; the second, because the Susanna of the later day sacrificed her life to her vow of virginity. No inspired boy-prophet sprang up to save her; but a great multi-



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tude of redeemed souls, won by her prayers and example, accompanied her to the home and the arms of her Heavenly Bridegroom.

Susanna's father, Gabinus, was related to the family of Diocletian; and it seems that he held some charge in the imperial household where his daughter grew up. She was a Christian from her babyhood, and had probably been baptised by her uncle, Pope Caius II, who also suffered martyrdom in the great persecution. In the midst of frenzied corruption and luxury, Susanna grew to maidenhood pure as a snowdrop, and as beautiful as she was pure. Her father, a devout Christian, guarded her jealously, but all his vigilance could not prevent the fame of her beauty being spread abroad. Maximianus Galerius, the adopted son of Diocletian, having once looked on her face, fell madly in love with her, and, going to the Emperor, demanded her for his wife. The spoiled boy never asked in vain, and at once the order went forth that Susanna must prepare to become his bride. Her father Gabinus, deep in all his daughter's sweet counsels, must have had a heavy heart when he told her of the Emperor's command. There was no elation at the proffered honour. Both knew that there was only one end before them. The honour would be refused, and the refusal meant death. How still they must have sat in the golden house that night, holding each other's hand, and speaking in whispers of the short, quick road to glory that lay be-

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fore them! What fervent prayers went up for faith and courage to endure to the end!

Then, as the night drew on, the hunted Christians came gliding through the long, underground passages that led—indeed still lead—to the catacomb refuge three miles away, now marked by the Church of Sant' Agnese. Pope Caius, too, came; and Susanna, like St. Cecilia, was repaid for the mother joys she had renounced on earth by becoming the spiritual mother of two hundred souls, baptised then by St. Caius, and all crowned with martyrdom before the great persecution was over. In the convent attached to the church is a very ancient fresco depicting this scene—the neophytes crowding up to the font; St. Caius, with earnest, eager face, pouring the water on their heads; while Susanna stands smiling by, her hands raised in a quaint gesture of joyful applause.

Her decision, however, when it became known at court and in the city, elicited no applause, but only scornful unbelief. The daughter of Gabinus actually dared to refuse the greatest match in the Empire, the altogether adorably successful and fortunate young fellow whom every other girl in Rome would have accepted on her knees? It was unthinkable! How could she dare to give herself such airs? The young man himself seems to have behaved with a certain amount of self-restraint. Fearing that his passion would betray him into folly or violence if he ventured into her presence, he persuaded

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his friend Sebastian, the brilliant commander of the Pretorian Guard, to go and plead for him.

The name of Sebastian calls up one of the most splendid figures in all the chivalry of Christendom. His father was a noble Milanese, who had married a French wife; and their son was born in Milan, then a far more important city than Rome, so far as commerce and the defence of the Empire were concerned. It was the chief strategical point in all the North. Strong garrisons were stationed there, commanded by generals who knew their business, and who smiled scornfully at the suggestion that there were more important posts to be had in Rome. At the first sign of aggression from whatever quarter, Rome would shriek to them to protect it. And in Milan young Sebastian grew up, and was trained to arms, and loved his career with all his heart, as a good soldier should. His noble birth, his gallant young beauty, his spirit and charm, won all hearts; and he rose from one command to another, doubtless envied by men and loved by women.

But there was in Sebastian's life a source of joy and strength unsuspected by his comrades in arms. He was an ardent Christian, and used his many advantages to keep and protect the poor Christians, who, even when official persecution was not raging, had to suffer in a thousand ways from the rapacity of local governors and their armies of parasites. As I have noted elsewhere,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Italian Yesterdays."

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the various edicts issued from time to time against the followers of the new religion were never officially repealed, and nothing was easier for the man who coveted his Christian neighbour's goods than to denounce him and claim his property. Sebastian threw all the weight of his great influence (the greater because no one suspected him of any more personal motive than the one of chivalrous pity for the oppressed) into the scale in their defence, at the same time animating them to courage and patience on their hard way. His own time would come later, he knew; meanwhile perhaps among those who most profited by his help there were little cynical growlings—one can almost hear them: "Easy enough for him to say, 'Be steadfast! Endure to the end!' Why doesn't he come out and declare himself, instead of swaggering about in that gorgeous uniform, hail-fellow-well-met with our pagan tyrants and cutthroats? Perhaps they would treat us more decently if we had a few fine gentlemen like him in our ranks." And so on.

Then, suddenly, Sebastian disappears from Milan and is next heard of in Rome, prime favourite with the Emperor, advanced to the highest post in military honour, that of commander of the Pretorian Guard. Diocletian loads him with favours and honours, he is Maximianus' bosom friend, the courtiers follow suit; and all this just as Diocletian has decreed the tenth persecution of the



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Christians—a persecution more ferocious than any that had preceded it!

Surely Sebastian has faltered, has abandoned his faith, is saving himself by betraying his Saviour! Ah, no! This is the moment when his fellow-Christians in Rome need his help more than his old friends in Milan; and he has flown to their assistance, material and spiritual. He is everywhere—in the catacombs, in the prisons, feeding the hungry, comforting the despairing, spiring away whole companies into safety, and speaking great words to those whom even he can not save from torture and death. “Have no fear,” he says. “All Christ’s strength will be yours; and in a few hours you will be smiling down on us from His right hand. Pray for me, then, dear, valiant friends, that I may not fail to meet you there! My own hour is close now.”

The wonder of it is that no one dared denounce him. Perhaps it was felt that Diocletian’s fury when he learned the truth would wreak itself first on the object nearest at hand. At any rate, Sebastian is bathing in the full glow of imperial favour; for this is the moment that Maximianus chooses to charge him with his love mission to Susanna, the shadowy loveliness so carefully watched over by her father and his many dependents in the splendid dwelling that stands at the northwest corner of the grand new Baths—the “Palace of the People”—that



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Diocletian is building for the benefit of his devoted subjects.

True to the usual methods of selfish pleasure, this monster temple of luxury was cemented with innocent blood and untold suffering. The workmen, some forty thousand in number, were all Christian slaves. They left their pathetic little marks on their work—here a rough cross stamped into a brick, there an attempt at a palm or a *Pax* scratched on the plaster. They built all the visible glory which was to delight Roman eyes and senses; and they built the hundreds of staircases in the thickness of the walls, by which the army of highly trained slaves conducted quite noiselessly the service of the public. And when it was all finished, and Rome was laughing with delight over its new toy, ten thousand two hundred and three of the builders, with good St. Zeno at their head, were driven out to the Temple of Mars, where the Porta San Sebastiano stands to-day, and massacred to the last man. This did not take place till 302 or thereabouts, and Diocletian was merely “getting his hand in”; for the tenth persecution, instituted by him and proclaimed all over the Empire, did not officially begin till 303. Before the benign creature’s abdication two years later, he erected a “stately column near Aranda on the Douro,” on which he caused to be inscribed the fact that “the name of Christians, destroyers of the Republic [!]

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is abolished, and their superstition everywhere destroyed."

It was earlier than this that Sebastian, hearing of the sufferings of the Christians, came to Rome. It was on one of the hottest days in summer—early in August, 295—that he consented to carry Maximianus' message to Susanna. Already her father's house was a meeting-place and a refuge for the persecuted brethren, two secret underground passages having been dug from its cellars, by which they could escape to the country. One, three miles long, ran almost directly east to the Catacombs of St. Agnes. The other diverged southward, circled all the area of the Baths, and then also led eastward, joining the first about halfway. It was evidently intended as a last resource should the beginnings of the more direct one be discovered and betrayed to the enemy. Underground Rome was by that time a complete network of catacombs and hiding-places, one stratum below another—a vast labyrinth, of which we merely hold, as it were, the stray ends; but so far-reaching and deep that modern builders in Rome, notably in the erection of some of the new ministries, have had to dig as far into the earth as their edifices now rise above it, in order to lay any solid foundations at all. The modern architect can not command thousands of unpaid workers as did the builder of Diocletian's Baths; so the famous "Ministry of Finance" and the "National Debt Palace" cost a little more than

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they did, and are as ugly as the other iniquity was beautiful.

My old sacristan at Santa Susanna gravely informed me that St. Sebastian's conversion dated from his visit to the holy maiden, depicted on one of the frescoes of the apse where all her history is set forth. Here, as the handsome young officer is pleading with her, both he and she start apart, terrified and amazed; for, in a blaze of glory, an angry-eyed angel from heaven has swept down between them, and warns Sebastian back with threatening hand. The surging rush of the Angel's descent is splendidly given; and the girl shrinks under his wings in fear as great as that of the man who flings himself to one side to escape the arm that seems just about to strike him down. As a matter of fact, Sebastian could scarcely have failed to know that Susanna was a Christian, seeing that he was at the very heart of all Christian affairs; and that her father's brother, Caius, was the supreme ruler of the Church at the time. The only explanation of the story seems to be that he knew nothing of her vow of virginity, and perhaps even thought that, in becoming the wife of Diocletian's adopted son, she could use her influence to mitigate the sufferings of her coreligionists. But that was not to be. Susanna explains that there is to be no earthly bridegroom for her; and Sebastian goes back to carry to him who sent him her refusal of the offered honour.

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Diocletian, on hearing of her decision, issued his customary sentence—he probably repeated the too familiar words in his sleep, since they were so constantly on his lips; and when there was nothing else to talk about he could always order a few executions. Susanna was to be put to death, as well as her old father; and there were others waiting. “Let a good crowd be got together, and variously torn to pieces. The people will be pleased; and they have to be kept in good humour during these hot sirocco days, or they might get troublesome. Stay!” (And here some gleam of pleasure would show itself in the pouched eyes.) “We can have a little fun with Susanna’s father. Put him in the stocks in his own house, and let him starve to death.”

So it was done as the Emperor ordered; and above Susanna’s tomb in her old home is a strange and very ancient fresco, showing Gabinus and his daughter and another martyr, Tiburtius, the son of the Prefect Chromatius, looking out in sorrow and fear after they had heard the sentence. The cold grey sky behind them is unbroken by a gleam of light. No palms or crowns have been shown them yet. They are face to face with death, cold, agonising, horrible; and the Lord for whom they are to suffer has made no sign. It is the saddest picture in the world. The faces are those of heart-broken children whom their Father has deserted, and their eyes ask for Him almost despairingly.



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But the end was not like that. Upstairs, above the high altar, Susanna smiles her quiet, mysterious smile; while an unexplained light rests on her hair, and her thoughts seem very far away from the headsman who is already raising his axe. All the pictures of her are faithful to one type, and that must have been transmitted very carefully during the first few centuries; for it is rather an unusual one. A tall, graceful girl, with a round, almost childish face; dark eyes, very innocent, and happy except in that one picture; a soft mouth not over-small, a mass of pale brown hair wound closely round the head, and always that impression of the smile ready to return at any instant. I know Roman girls to-day, hard-working, good girls, with just such faces and colouring, and the same lovely expression.

So we see Susanna passing, and only then do we remember the fate that had been selected for poor Gabinus. Ah! here he is, in a great fresco all to himself, where he is shown sitting in the stocks, his poor ankles almost grown to the wood; for he has been there thirty days and nights, without food or drink; and his face is like that of a skull covered with tightly-drawn parchment, but his sad eyes turn to the group of Christians who kneel at his right hand; and one can almost hear the thread of a voice in which he is bidding them pray for him and for themselves in this tribulation.

He has not seen or has not cared to notice a group of



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men, insolent in their full-fed health and shining armour, who stand on the other side of him, falling back over each other in their surprise at finding him alive. There is no explanation of their coming. Perhaps some rumour had got abroad, or a jailer had reported that the old man was not dead yet and they had come to see what was the matter. What they have seen is that the God of the Christians is the true God, since He can work miracles like this that they behold; and then and there they vow to follow Him and none other. They, too, had to die to reach Him; and many thousands of others after Sebastian, who, despairing of helping or saving his brethren any longer in the awful storm that had broken loose, turned on the astonished Emperor, and in burning words, that seemed to scorch as they fell, reproached him for his vile cruelties, and declared that all along he himself had been a follower of Christ.

We all know the end—the commander of the Pretorian Guard stripped and bound and set up as a target for the Persian bowmen; his body, pierced with a hundred arrows, hanging corpse-like when they left it; Irene, the gentle lady, coming with her servants in the night to carry it home, and finding that the gallant heart was still beating; her long nursing of the martyr back to life, and his escaping from her custody as soon as he could move, to go and meet Diocletian in broad midday and once more threaten him with the vengeance of Heaven

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for his crimes; the Emperor's consternation when he believed he saw a spirit, and his quick relief on discovering that this was indeed Sebastian in the flesh; and the second martyrdom, on the marble steps, under the clubs of the lictors. No mistakes were made that time. It was only his mangled, disfigured body that was borne to Irene's house, and thence through the dark underground passages to the catacomb cemetery; for Sebastian's brave kind soul had really reached home at last.

The fresco to the right of the altar has nothing to do with Susanna's history. It represents the martyrdom of the seven sons of St. Felicitas, under the "mild and enlightened rule" of Marcus Aurelius. The poor, brave woman holds her youngest son in her arms, hiding his eyes from the slaughter of his brothers, lest the terror of it should shake his fortitude for his own end, so close at hand.

I always feel a certain terror when I find myself underground, and the old chill seized me when the sacristan began feeling among his keys for the one that opens the iron gate that guards St. Susanna's tomb. Our only light was a scrap of *cerino*—the twisted taper so much in use here—and its faint gleams seemed to make the darkness beyond the gate more inky black. Then the little girl, with a laugh, twisted her slim body between the bars, and stood smiling at us like a captive spirit till the rusty key turned in the lock and we could follow

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her. Another door had to be opened before we found ourselves in the series of underground chambers, once beautiful with sunshine striking on painted walls and mosaic pavements, and still more beautiful with the presence of the fair maiden saint. "Here she passed every day," said the little girl, stooping down and touching the mosaic lovingly. "See, I will give the *signora* some bits of it to take home!" And from a broken corner she picked up nine of the little cubes and put them into my hand.

I was admiring just then a piece of ancient wall, still covered with that wonderful lacquer-like stucco, part a royal crimson, part pure white, as fresh as if it had been laid on but yesterday—such depths of colour as we have no secret for now. In order to preserve the remains and support the heavy superstructures of the church and street, the subterranean spaces were divided into small chambers—each roofed with a solid vault, and sustained by massive additional walls—when Carlo Maderna built the church for Sixtus V. The architect had to be an archæologist in those days, and Maderna's underground work is scientific to the last degree—preserving every vestige of the ancient topography, piercing tunnels for ventilation from chamber to chamber and passage to passage of the vast labyrinth which stretches, at this point, from the tomb of St. Susanna under the high altar in the church right across the wide Piazza to the farther wall of San Bernardo opposite.

## Chapter Four

### A ROMAN CHRISTMAS

**I**T was rather a wonderful experience, my Christmas in the old palace where once Vittoria Accoramboni had flitted from stair to stair—where Luigi, the madly profligate son of the “Banker of Kings,” Agostino Chigi had held high revel, and which, after his time, had passed into the hands of the *Eccellentissima Casa* that holds it still, a house which for the last three or four centuries has been the most God-fearing, the most self-respecting, the most conservative in Rome. I thought I knew the place well—had been in and out so often that I was amazed, on taking up my abode there, to find myself lost half-a-dozen times during the first evening. Staircase branching from staircase, room after room—all strange to me yet; to wander down flights and flights of crimson-carpeted stairs where Actæons and Dianas and Venuses gleamed in creamy marble from their shadowy niches—and then to open a secret door at random and find myself actually within the gemmed shrine of the chapel, all shimmering with lights and gold—it seemed more like one of those aching dreams of Italy that used to visit me in my



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Arctic exile and fade despairingly away in the snow-bleak daylight of a winter morning.

But this was a winter night, the 24th of December—Christmas Eve—and I was truly in the Rome of my birth. My friend was waiting for me in her own sitting-room, where in days past we have climbed some heights of thought together, travelled through more than one Valley of Shadows to the bare straight road of resignation. There was a wonderful light in her dark eyes that night—the radiance that comes after tears. We neither of us looked at the great portrait that faces the writing table—all that is left of the beloved man who was head of the family when we first met.

“This is the children’s festival,” she said softly. “I am so glad you are going to share it with me. And I am so glad they have not *all* flown yet!”

For three of the fair daughters are missing from the circle; two to homes of their own in the North, and one, the angel of the house, to love and pray in the “Garden Enclosed” of a convent.

“This was *her* room,” said Margu rite as she led me into a dove-tinted chamber above her own. “There is her little palm-branch over the bed still. A grey dove flew in here one day from the church roof opposite—it was as if she had come back! Can you find your way down to the dining-room? If not, Giulia will fetch you—her rooms are on this floor. We arranged it all for



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the girls—when there were more of them—the boys and Monsignore have another wing, so you can run about here in a dressing-gown or anything else with no fear of meeting any of the men. This is the dovecote—all for women and children! Ah, there is the first gong! *Au revoir!*”

The drawing-room seemed very full and brilliant when I descended to it. There was a little crowd round the piano where somebody was playing one of the “Pifferai” Christmas melodies and all the others were humming the air or correcting the player with a sudden plunge of fingers on the keys. Marguérite was talking in a low voice to Monsignore on the sofa, and in another corner “Mademoiselle,” Donna Giulia’s “companion,” was sorting out dolls and dolls’ clothes from a pile of things that were waiting to be hung on the Christmas tree. Monsignore is an anomaly in a way. He is a prelate and a man of means, the last person in the world whom one would expect to find filling the position of private chaplain and mentor to the boys. It is sheer affection on both sides which has made him one of the family. As an old friend he hastened to help and console in the great and crushing loss which Marguérite and her children sustained in the sudden death of the husband and father some years since, and after that it was felt that his kindly presence was too precious to be dispensed with, while he on his side was only too happy to become one of

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the circle that loves and venerates him so truly. So Monsignore has his room in the bachelor's wing, his honoured place at table, says his Mass in the Chapel, is a real friend and playmate to the two boys, and, when the summer holidays come, carries them off to his own country house by the sea where they boat and bathe and run wild for six weeks before going up into the mountains near Florence to their mother's estate, the gathering place of the entire family during August and September. They were thirty at table there this year!

Two years ago, when the second boy was seventeen, it was thought that his rather delicate health would benefit by sea travelling, so Monsignore accompanied him to America—North and South; and this experience still looms large in the prelate's mind and conversation. He confided to me that he had lost his temper in the most complete Roman fashion in New York when the Superior at St. Patrick's Cathedral, to whom he had applied for permission to say Mass there, refused to have anything to do with him until he produced his papers. Nino, whose limited knowledge of English was the only medium of communication between the two ecclesiastics, says that it was the most trying interview of his life. Monsignore said, "Tell him that of course I will bring my papers—meanwhile all I want to know is when can I say Mass?"

The reverend Superior, who for some reason was very suspicious of the stranger's orthodoxy, replied testily,

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“Tell him to bring his papers first! I will not say a word until I have seen those!”

“Ask him what he takes me for, the obstinate creature?” Monsignore flashed back—always through poor Nino; and the interview closed in storm. “I think now,” Monsignore added, “that my costume had something to do with his doubts and that he was not altogether without excuse for his rudeness.”

“Why, what were you wearing?” I enquired.

“A rough grey travelling suit—a turndown collar and tie—and a pot hat!”

I broke into uncontrollable laughter. The picture thus called up was of such glorious incongruity! “Why?” I managed to say at last.

“Well, you see, we did not know how priests dressed, in the street, in the States, and we decided that it was best to be unobtrusive—but I suppose it was rather startling. Afterwards I discarded those worldly garments and wore the black coat and Roman collar like the rest. But I was in such a rage with that blessed Superior that I never went back to St. Patrick’s, but travelled over to Newark and said my Mass there! Ah, *there* was a dear prelate—he received me like a brother—I shall never forget his kindness.”

I have been anticipating a little. This conversation took place at the dinner table, and I ventured, by way of corollary, to remark that some of the ritualistic clergy-

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men had been known to impose on the rectors of foreign churches to the extent of celebrating the entire Mass—on false pretences; and I told the story of one such impostor who applied at a church in Belgium for the necessary permission. The sacristan, the only person on the premises, was so completely deceived by the gentleman's appearance that he promised at once to prefer his request to the parish priest. "And meanwhile," he added, "if your Reverence will say what hour would suit you tomorrow morning, I will write it down."

"The hour—ah,"—the ritualist rubbed his chin—"I shall have to go back to the hotel and consult my wife about that!"

At this unexpected climax there was a roar of merriment round the table, and further. For the ancient butler, Benedetto, who dandled Marguérite on his knee when she was a baby, broke down and laughed delightedly, while the solemn young footmen turned away with heaving shoulders, to busy themselves at the sideboard. I thought I could even discern a smile on the face of the imposing portrait of "Cardinal Giacomo" opposite to me on the wall, he who was Legate at Ferrara in 1715 or thereabouts, and whose letters, complaining of the frightful expenses he was put to for the entertainment of a certain English royalty, form an amusing collection in the family archives.

The dining-room, which has never been modernised, is

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not a very large apartment, considering the size of the house and of the family. The table, however, appears capable of unlimited stretching, and it was a large party that sat round it for the Christmas Eve dinner, called in Rome *la Cena delle porcherie* (the supper of—horrors!) because of the *magro stretto* which has to be observed on that day. No eggs, milk, or lard may be used in its preparation, and to turn out a palatable meal really taxes the powers of the chef. And this year there were more than ordinary difficulties to contend with, seeing that December has been a month of severe storms which, combined with the terrors of the floating mines that have destroyed many lives already, have made the fishermen hesitate about putting out to sea. However, the usual number of courses was supplied, and I found myself tasting things of wonderful appearance and flavour, the materials of which are yet a closed book to me. One is always more courageous in that way in company, I find! And the company was certainly of the cheeriest. My immediate neighbour, the present head of the house, I remember as a solemn little fellow, rather crushed under the rule of a ferociously exigent tutor, whose memory, I was not surprised to find, is scarcely regarded with affection by his late pupil. Those days had seemed fairly recent to me, but on seeing my young friend again, I gasped and began to count the years. For Alessandro is a notable man, ruling his big domains with a very firm hand—and



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his forehead is a good deal more uncovered than it has any right to be. He is still a little solemn, perhaps with the cares and responsibilities which descended too soon on his shoulders, but he is ridiculously happy too, for three years ago he married the girl of his heart, the heiress of a princely house, thus crowning a romance which has lasted as long as they can both remember anything. That evening he was trying hard to be polite to his mother's old friend, but all the time his glance was straying across the table to catch that of the ethereally fair girl who sat opposite to me. She looked very lovely in her moonlight coloured satin, with a ripple of diamonds at her throat and the superb Venetian red of her hair catching the soft light from the chandelier. She gets her fair northern colouring from her Florentine mother, and it strikes a surprising note in the dark-browed Roman family of her husband. So young that she has not yet forgotten to curtsy to older people, always the gentlest, most unassuming creature, yet now she carries herself with a certain joyous majesty, since, just a year ago, in the great white velvet bedroom on the first floor, was born "Monsieur Titì," the splendid little tyrant round whom the entire family revolves devoutly—and Donna Livia knows that she has fulfilled the whole duty of woman!

No greater contrast in type can be imagined than that presented by her nineteen-year-old sister-in-law, Donna Giulia, a real pomegranate blossom of the South, with

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night-black hair, straight dark eyebrows, aquiline features, and the glorious crimson of her cheeks and lips. A child, and a very dear child, as yet—but with her own mother's eyes of sombre fire, telling of alarming possibilities of storm and sunshine in her composition. May her course be a happy one—it will certainly not be over-smooth!

These Roman children are always giving one surprises. In their early childhood they are so often sallow, colourless, not beautiful at all. A few years pass—one sees them again—and behold an outburst of tint and radiance that takes one's breath away! They certainly justify the old Roman saying, "*Brutta in culla, bella in piazza*,"—ugly in the cradle, beautiful in the street. The boys come into their own more slowly. Giulia's twin brother, Nino, is a tall, well-grown young man with a very successful moustache already, but he has little beauty except his deep shining eyes and charming expression. As for Marguérite's youngest, just twelve years old, he is a pickle, with the nose of a conqueror and the solemn face of a Byzantine saint, combined with an audacity of statement that no respect for his elders can suppress. I happened to say that I had been watching the pigeons basking in a short moment of sunshine on the opposite roof, that afternoon. Whereupon Pippo remarked, "Oh, those are not pigeons—those are crows!"

"Crows?" The protest came from all round the big

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table. "Pippo, what are you talking about? Crows are black!"

"Nothing of the kind!" retorted Pippo; "crows are grey and white. I will catch one and show you all!"

"Try!" said Nino; "when you catch a grey and white crow we will put him in a glass case, with your name on it, you little duffer!"

"I *will*," cried the boy, glancing at his brother, "and when you see it—*ti faccio rimanere con due palmi di naso!*"

In good Roman "to remain with a palm's length of nose" means—to look like a fool! This being unparliamentary, Pippo had to be snubbed.

"My poor child," said his mother, "whatever else does or does not happen to you in life, you had better not threaten others with a palm's length of nose, for you will always carry that with you!"

Pippo grew grave, and when next I glanced his way I caught him stealthily measuring his portentous profile to see if it really extended to the length of his hand at full stretch.

The evening was still young when we found ourselves in the drawing-room again—the solemn midnight hour still distant, and Donna Giulia and her little *Dame de compagnie*, a much loved inmate of the hospitable home, brought out their work, some dolls still to be dressed for the Christmas tree of the morrow. Some-

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thing or other called them away for a moment, and then, to my silent amusement, Monsignore sidled up to the sofa and began trying to dress one of the flaxen-haired dollies. He thought nobody was watching him, and it was really rather touching to see him fingering the miniature garments in perplexity, and then, giving up the task, gravely swathe the china baby in a roll of flannel and arrange it in the work basket like a *Santo Bambino* in a crib. Somewhere under his petunia cassock beats a heart that reaches out to little children very lovingly. A minute or two later some *boutade* from the irrepressible Pippo caused him to rise and cross the room with the intention of calling the youngster to order, and he thus stood for a moment under the bright light of the central chandelier, a gorgeous figure in the vivid red-purple of his ecclesiastical rank. All eyes were drawn to him, and then a long murmur went round the room, culminating in exclamations from several mouths at once—"Monsignore! Your sash is red, not purple!" "Cardinal red!" "Have they made you an *Eminenza* without telling us?"

Monsignore actually blushed. "Red? nothing of the kind!"—taking up the fringed ends of the broad crimson girdle and patting them affectionately. "What an ideal! Where are your eyes, all of you? This is pure ecclesiastical purple—exactly the correct shade!"

Marguérite doubled over in helpless laughter, and the young people shouted with glee. "Vain man," they cried,



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“you are dreaming of a cardinal’s hat, and you bought your new sash to go with it!”

“Don’t you mind, Monsignore,” I said; “it is the most beautiful colour in the world and you look simply gorgeous. They are all wishing they could wear the same!”

Monsignore drew himself up and spoke quite seriously. “If I say it is purple that is enough! I think I ought to know—considering!” And he withdrew, repeating, “Purple, pure *purple!*” till the door closed behind him. Then somebody glanced at the clock, Margu rite made a sign to me, and we two slipped away, to put on our cloaks and veils and go over to the church opposite, to spend the last hour in silence and preparation for the midnight Mass.

To both of us that last hour of Christmas Eve is the sweetest and most solemn of the whole year. The hush is the promise of the “Gloria”—the half-lit gloom the herald of the Sun of Righteousness. We had entered the church by a distant side door, the general public not being admitted till nearly midnight. The Blessed Sacrament had been exposed all day and now Its frame of stars made the only light in the great old church, except where three gentlemen who were saying their office on one side of the chancel held each a lighted taper to his book. One has not many words to one’s prayers on a night like that. One kneels in silence of heart and soul, waiting,





CHURCH OF SANTA FRANCESCA ROMANA AND ARCH OF TITUS, ON THE  
VIA SACRA



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waiting—with the Holy Ones in the Stable at Bethlehem or with the shepherds on the hillside, on whom some mute rapture of awe must surely have descended long before “the Angel of the Lord came down and glory shone around.”

The three quarters rang out from the bell tower and we rose to our feet and returned to the house where the Holy Child would be our very own guest for a little while. Coming in from the darkness outside, the place for His reception seemed almost warm and beautiful enough even for Him. The chapel itself is just a shrine, not more than ten feet square, but its gilded doors open wide on to a large and lofty room hung with green and crimson damask, soft with the richness of age, and lighted by old-fashioned ring-chandeliers far up near the ceiling. In this room the *prie-dieus* were set, almost filling it up—two great armorial ones in front close to the chapel itself, and rows of simpler kneeling stools behind. Very soon the place was filled, the servants filed in from a small masked door in the wall, and young Pippo, very solemn now, began to light up the forest of wax candles on and round the altar.

I wish I could describe the exquisite beauty of that shrine of light. From vault to floor the walls seemed to run with gold. At the back of the altar, half hiding the old painting in which the Madonna holds out the Holy Child to the adoration of some enraptured Saints,

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stood a row of tall reliquaries of rock crystal and gold, each guarding a precious relic and making a kind of screen on which the masses of flowers threw tints like jewels, rose and white and honey-coloured. The altar front was a marvellous piece of *Seicento* embroidery on white satin, bossy with gold, scrolled with lilies and roses and bearing below the sacred symbols two coats of arms which show that it was worked for the celebration of a certain marriage in the seventeenth century. The sides of the chapel are covered with embroideries and paintings, but these almost disappear behind the long glass cases filled with smaller reliquaries, and high up on either side, beyond the reach of childish fingers, are two small gilded cabinets, one containing the famous piece of the True Cross which has been a treasured possession of the family for many centuries, the other a personal souvenir of the most sacred kind.

But the loveliest thing of all on that Christmas Eve altar was the little *Bambino* smiling down at us from his flower-decked throne in the centre—not holding out his arms, as most *Bambinos* do, but hugging himself a little as if feeling cold in spite of all the light and splendour. Ah, the iconoclast may rail at “images,” the æsthete may cry that they are not high art—but no merely intangible conception, no triumph of a great painter’s brush, can bring before us the smiling, helpless Babe of Bethlehem shivering in the December night like one of

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these faintly tinted small figures on its bed of straw, set there before our eyes high above the lighted altar and the golden Tabernacle. There does not live the woman who, looking on that, can help feeling the mother-longing to hold *Him* in her arms and warm Him on her heart!

All through Advent we had been thinking of that, praying that the hearts to which He was to come this Christmas night, however poor in virtue and love, at least be clean and warm and quiet—since that is all the Lord of Glory asks.

But now Monsignore, who has entered the chapel by its secret door, has vested in the shining robes laid out for him and stands at the foot of the steps, with Pippo kneeling beside him—waiting for the stroke of midnight. The hush is intense. Every ear is strained to catch the signal. Suddenly it rings out in a clear peal from the church tower, every bell in Rome has taken it up and is sending it far across the Campagna from church to church, even to the hills and the sea.

*"Introibo ad Altare Dei,"*—Monsignore's voice thrills like a clarion. And Pippo's clear young tones respond,  
*"Ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam!"*

The sacred rite leads on—the sense of expectation is so tense as to be almost painful—and when it comes to, *"Gloria in excelsis Dio et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis,"* something like a sob of joy breaks from every heart. The Christ Child has come, He is there with us,



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the Prince of Peace Who will surely heal and save our outraged, weeping, warring world.

It was at that moment that a very lovely thing happened this Christmas night. Below the windows, in the piazza outside, the Pifferari, the shepherds of the hills, whom I had not heard since before 1870, began to play one of the beautiful Christmas hymns of the Abruzzi, those clear childlike melodies that have the songs of early birds and the sound of leaping brooks and the cool freshness of the dawn in their soft lilt.

The woman kneeling next to me was crying silently. I believe I was crying too.

The three Masses, each more beautiful than the last, were ended, and towards two A. M. we were all gathered in Donna Livia's salon to wish one another *La Bonne Noel* and drink to everybody's health in champagne or bouillon, according to our tastes. Only then did I realise who it was who had knelt on the *prie-dieu* next mine in the chapel—a sweet-faced woman whose grown-up son and pretty daughters had shared our devotions most reverently. As we shook hands I exclaimed, "But—we were together in Sorrento—in '97!" and then I deplored my heedlessness, for I saw in her eyes the memory of our last meeting, a most embarrassing one for *us*, though she,

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poor little thing, was past any such minor emotions at the moment and was sobbing out her grief to us women in the drawing-room at the villa, while the faithless husband, out on the terrace, was raving like a lunatic, to another man, over the charms of a destructively beautiful American woman who had enslaved him—for the time. It was dramatic, but most uncomfortable!

And now there is not a more harmonious household in Rome than theirs. The young wife finally rose to the situation like a heroine, reconquered her light-hearted spouse's affections by her patience and sweetness and firmness, has brought up her children to perfection—has won all along the line, and goes on her way loved and respected by all the world, from which she has succeeded in forcing respect for her husband too. I wonder how many "advanced" women of to-day could record a similar victory?

I was roused to the fact of its being really Christmas morning when Marguérite came to my room towards ten o'clock, fully dressed for the street, to tell me that she was flying off to see her "little nun," for whom I knew it would not be Christmas Day without a glimpse of her adored mother. I "put in" the rest of the morning in the church, where they were having some divine

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music for High Mass, and after lunch raced up to St. Mary Major's to see the Holy Crib, which is exposed on the High Altar all through the day. At that early hour of the afternoon there were but few people in the Basilica, which for all its glorious space and grandeur, will ever be my own "Home Church," the dearest and kindest and most familiar—for was I not born to the sound of its deep-toned bells wafting in at our nursery windows together with the song of the wind in the cypress tops and the music of all the fountains in the garden!

As I walked up the broad pillared aisle, shadowy enough (for our Christmas sky was very dark and lowering), the one thing that stood out was the reliquary set by itself above the high altar and surrounded by a ring of soft topaz-coloured flames. Is there anything so beautiful as the light of those many-times refined wax candles, playing on broad surfaces of flawless rock-crystal? I doubt whether the "Pearly Gates" can show a lovelier radiance! And—since rock-crystal is very rarely found in such large blocks—I think that when the elements, set loose at God's Word to fulfil their laws, broke into that passion of fire in which our world was born, and hurled atom against atom with such frenzied force, and yet such faultless mathematical perfection that no crystal great or small has ever contained a false angle, some great invulnerable angel swept down amid the

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flames and bade them work the miracle which stands on the high altar of St. Mary Major's to-day, blocks of crystal of unimagined magnitude, flawless as a sheet of water falling in the sun. To shelter—what? A couple of rough boards, some three feet long, which a herdsman placed inside a big stone manger, that his ox and his ass might nuzzle at their fodder without wasting and scattering it! Up to the beginning of the fifth century the Holy Crib remained in its original place in Bethlehem, the one-time stable having long before been transformed into a chapel where devout pilgrims came to pray in great numbers before the lowly bed on which the Infant Saviour had lain. It was in order to be near it that St. Jerome went to live at Bethlehem; before the Holy Crib he prayed for and obtained the light and grace to make the translation of the Scriptures which is our "Vulgate" Bible; and it was there, drawn by the ineffable love of the Lord in the humility and gentleness of His Infancy, that Paula, and Eustochia, and Paula the younger, came, leaving all the glories of their great state in Rome, to live and die close to the birthplace of Christ. It would be too long a task to trace here the after-history of the relic through the ages, but it seems to have been rescued and brought to Italy when Palestine fell under the domination of the Saracens, and was finally deposited in the Basilica of Our Lady of the Snows. Margaret of Austria, wife of Philip III of Spain, presented a rich

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reliquary for the "Crib," but this, having been carried off by the French (with many other treasures) during their occupation of Rome under Napoleon, was replaced in 1830 by the present one, also the gift of a lady of Spain, the Duchess of Villa Hermosa.

Time does not seem to count in the Eternal City. The other day at Palazzo Patrizi, I paused before a strange old portrait of a man, with a very earnest dark face, holding in one hand a plan of Santa Maria Maggiore and in the other a white substance like snow. The costume seemed to be of the time of Giotto. "Who is that?" I asked. "And why is he in here with the ancestors?"

"Oh, that is supposed to be John the Patrician, who founded the church in 358. You know the story—how he and his wife having no children resolved to leave all their property to Our Blessed Lady and prayed to her to let them know what she wished to have done with it; how she appeared to them in a dream on the night of the 4th of August and said they were to build a church on the spot on the Esquiline which should be found covered with snow the next morning. When they rose and went out there was the snow—just where the church now stands, and Pope Liberius came and traced the plan of it in the snow with his crozier—and we Patrizis claim John the Patrician for our ancestor. But it is all rather shadowy—the attested genealogies only



## A ROMAN CHRISTMAS

go back to eight hundred and something—so we cannot be sure!”

Genealogies—they suggest queer thoughts in Rome. On Christmas Day, at the regulation hour of four o'clock, the tree was lighted up and exhibited in the house where I was staying, for the benefit of some score of little cousins of Donna Livia's baby, and it was rather funny to see a Colonna, an Orsini, and a Caetani, all only recently short-coated, repeating history in their determined efforts to possess themselves of one another's property—woolly lambs and gilt walnuts having taken the place of provinces and fortified towns! Even the “Balias,” splendidly handsome young women from the hills, gorgeous in corals and gold lace and velvet, glared at each other like traditional foes. The one who is for the moment the personal property of the small son of the house, finally retired into a corner in a furious fit of sulks, clutching Titì to her as if some one were trying to steal him.

“What is it, Balia?” I asked her. “You look so angry!”

“Haven't I a right to be angry?” she cried. “All those *others*,” with a glance of withering scorn at Titì's guests rolling about on the carpet amid a tidal wave of toys, “have more than they can hold—and here is this angel from Heaven, the Master of the House, with his blessed little hands empty! They have forgotten *him*—the heartless ones! Never mind, my beautiful, you shall have *all* those shining things off the tree before I put you to bed!”

## Chapter Five

### A "ROMANA DI ROMA"

#### I

**I**N the year of Grace 1384 there lay on the banks of the Tiber a ruined city which men called Rome. If we of a later and happier day were granted the vision of what it was then, it would require a strong effort of our imagination to believe that the one was the cradle of the other. Of the few great buildings which stand out as landmarks of history, some were still buried under formless mountains of mould and rubbish; others that had survived flame and earthquake were despoiled of many of their distinguishing features when the new-born passion for beauty laid violent hands on all that could serve its turn in the three following centuries. Even eighteenth-century engravings give one the startled sense of beholding things in a dream, so complete is the transformation since accomplished. But if we could see the Rome of 1384 we should cry out that only a miracle could evolve from utter desolation and ruin the city which Piranesi so lovingly and powerfully lays before our eyes.

Forsaken by its rulers, devastated to depopulation by the plague of 1348 and the appalling earthquake which

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overwhelmed it in the same year; a mass of hovels clinging together on soil that was one vast cemetery intersected with streams of filth, invaded by putrid swamps, marked only here and there by the frowning tower of one of the three or four masterful nobles who found their profit in remaining in a city where there was none to check their rapacity and bloodthirstiness—it comes as a revelation to learn that even then there were houses where people led Christian lives, surrounded by richness and decorum, and apparently perfectly confident that their descendants would continue to do the same. It may be that such healthy illusions aided in the final resurrection of civilisation; and that they had at least one reassuring foundation—the seat of the supreme Pontificate had been restored to its true home—the rest would come, with faith and time.

It was in 1377 that the great event happened. A Frenchman, Roger de Beaufort, young, ardent, truly desiring the Kingdom of God, had been elected Pope at Avignon in 1370, and for six long years, in the lovely city on the banks of the Rhone, had dreamed of travelling south and claiming St. Peter's heritage, abandoned seventy years earlier and now lying orphaned and desolate, while almost all that was illustrious or ambitious or venturesome crowded to Avignon to seek favour at the brilliant Papal Court. So furious was the resentment when the French Pope (who had taken the name of Gregory

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XI), carried out his design, that his abandonment of Avignon resulted in what is known as the "Great Schism of the West," antipopes being elected and set up in the French city by the kings and emperors who refused to renounce the immense advantage of actually holding the Spiritual Head of Christendom in their own power.

Gregory, to whom the sight of Rome must have been like a vision of desolation, died a year later, it is said, of a broken heart, but the incredibly unhealthy condition of the town probably hastened his end. At the time few seemed to realise that he had laid down his life for a principle, and it was only some two hundred years later that a memorial of his deed was erected over his almost forgotten grave by the city which he had saved to his own hurt. The Romans of his day felt no gratitude for the brilliant young Frenchman, whose homesick longings for his own country were no secret to them. When he died they buried him in a plain coffin, with the briefest of inscriptions, in the church known now by the name of a baby girl who was born in the desolate but re nascent city seven years after his death, Santa Francesca Romana.

She was indeed a child of the soil, to whom every street and stone of the desecrated city were to become familiar as the rooms of her own house. So far as the chronicles tell us (and they are both contemporary and minute), she only once, in all her life, went further from the city than her vineyard outside the Porta San Paolo.

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The distracted condition of the country rendered traveling almost impossible for women, and apart from this the Roman lady of those days was so weighted with duties and occupations and interests at home that there was scant leisure left for anything else in her busy existence.

Messer Paolo Bussa, with his wife, Jacobella dei Roffredeschi, rejoiced greatly when a little daughter was born to them, in the year 1384, in their big house near the Piazza Navona. On the very day of her birth she was, according to the good old custom, carried to the Church of Sant' Agnese to be baptised, and no vision or revelation seems to have instructed her parents that this tiny bundle of humanity was destined so to bless and glorify the city of her birth that of all the Saints the Church venerates she was to be the only one honoured by being called "of Rome."

The lines between good and evil living were very clearly marked in those days. The virtuous had to cut themselves off from the impious in a definite manner, saying to the world of faction and murder and robbery, "Stay thou on that side—for on *this* am I!" So it came to pass that although Paolo Bussa and his wife were closely related to some of the fighting Barons, Orsinis, Savellis, and so on, they lived quietly in their own way and refused to be drawn into the bloody quarrels which devastated the town. And people left them alone, for, although the times were so stormy, we read that Madonna



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Jacobella went out every day to visit one church or another, and always took the little Francesca with her. Even so do Roman mothers of the lower and middle classes to-day. And the little ones sit big-eyed and entranced in their mothers' arms, through the longest function, gazing in rapture at the soft radiance of the wax candles, the masses of flowers, the glitter of gold on the moving vestments, turning sharply towards the organ-loft when the great chants peal out and sometimes making their baby voices heard in coos of pleasure. It must have been a pretty sight to behold stately Madonna Jacobella come out of the dark archway of her house on a sunny Roman morning, dressed in her rich straight robes, with her little girl clinging to her hand as, followed by their servant, they made their way to Santa Maria Nova—the church which later was to bear the tiny daughter's name. The people used to stop to look at the child, for from her very earliest days there hung about her an ethereal loveliness that seemed to point her out for some wonderful destiny, and with the quick Latin intuition they would say, as she went by, "That one is born to be a saint!"

Wonderful indeed was the path that Heaven traced out for her, crowded with overwhelming joys, with crushing sorrows; a path in which from her first to her last day she walked in unerring humility and sweetness, shedding light in the dark places, comforting the desolate and converting the sinners, and doing so much towards the res-

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toration of the spiritual life in her native city that it is no wonder her chronicler says, "She rose upon Rome as a star in a dark night."

St. Catherine of Sienna (her great object, that of restoring the Papacy to Rome, was only accomplished later) died four years before Francesca was born, but it was as if her shining mantle had fallen on the head of the little maiden, and indeed, as the great Benedictine writer Dom Guéranger, points out, it was precisely at the time of the greatest tribulations that God illuminated and comforted His Church by sending His greatest saints. Every epoch of rebellion and heresy has been made radiant by some matchless star of holiness; may the merciful portent hold true for our own sad times!

Children had to grow up quickly in the fourteenth century. By the time Francesca was six years old she was a sedate little maiden with a plan of life traced out that the strongest would hesitate to embrace now. She had learned all that her mother could teach her, and was that mother's little right hand, helping her in the many household tasks that the great lady of those days shared with her servants. But other learning had come to Jacobella's daughter, an infused understanding of the Sacred Mysteries, a passionate, whole-hearted love of God and a burning charity for her fellow men which shone through all her actions. Always bright and gay, and growing more beautiful day by day,

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all the hours that were not filled with duties were passed in ecstatic prayer from which she came at her mother's call, bringing with her all the fragrance and light of the heavenly places where her little spotless soul habitually dwelt. When she was seven years old, the age which the Church lays down as that of reason and the assuming of individual responsibility towards God, Jacobella took her to the saintly Father Antonio dei Savelli and confided to him the spiritual direction which he exercised over Francesca for the greater part of her life.

He seems to have been a man of great holiness, sympathy, and experience in the guidance of souls. Even so, one can not but think that he must have marvelled sometimes at the strange ways by which Supreme Love was leading his little penitent. He very quickly realised that this was a soul apart, sent into the world for a special mission, and while restraining the ardent, generous child from more than one sacrifice she wished to make, he yet permitted her to practise the severest self-denial in all the little pleasures which appeal so strongly to the young. And so it came to pass that while still a child, Francesca was already far advanced in the training which makes the true athlete of God. Her desire was to devote herself entirely to His service and to her His will seemed clear—that service was to be rendered in the cloister. No other outlook seemed possible to her. He Who had possessed her heart from the first dawn of her

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reason would never consent to share it with an earthly spouse.

Her confessor, Don Antonio di Monte Savello, to whom she confided every thought, bade her persevere in her resolution to serve God to the utmost extent of her capacity, but at the same time enjoined upon her the most complete obedience to His will, and would not hear of her binding herself to the religious life by any vows, at her tender age. She was an only child, her parents were noble and very wealthy; and these facts, combined with her beauty and goodness, had already made more than one great family anxious to receive her as a daughter-in-law. She was twelve years old—the marriageable age for a girl in those far-off days—and her father, Paolo Bussa, after much thought, decided to accede to the request of the head of the Ponziani family and give his cherished ewe lamb in marriage to their son. From every point of view the choice appeared to be a perfect one. The Ponzianis were as noble and wealthy as Francesca's parents, and as loyal to the decrees of God and the Church; their eldest son had married Vannoza di Santa Croce, a sweet and noble girl who would be a good friend to her little sister-in-law; and, finally, Lorenzo himself, the chosen bridegroom, seven or eight years older than Francesca, was a perfect specimen of a young Roman noble, handsome, warm-hearted, upright in character, and chaste in life.

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According to custom all the negotiations for the marriage were concluded between the elders before a word was said to the girl herself. It would have been a breach of decorum to mention the matter to her at all before that. Then Paolo Bussa sent for Francesca, and, as if he were giving her the most joyful piece of news that a maid could hear, informed her that he had chosen Lorenzo Ponziani for her husband, and that their marriage would take place immediately.

What was his surprise when the ever-smiling, submissive child cast herself at his feet in floods of tears, entreating him to desist from his resolution, and declaring with all the fire of her heart, that no power on earth should induce her to give herself to Lorenzo Ponziani or any other earthly bridegroom!

It was her first rebellion; in everything else, she declared, she was ready to obey her parents as heretofore, but never, never, in this! She was God's alone—she would not be stolen from Him.

Then Paolo Bussa, stunned at first by the amazing fact that his daughter was opposing herself to his authority, came to himself and flew into a true Italian rage. Never had any one heard of such audacity as hers, he vowed; never had it been known that a decently brought up child should venture to have a will of her own in such matters! Trembling with anger he ordered her from his presence, bidding her go and pray for better sentiments



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and warning her that the marriage would take place at the appointed time, no matter what those sentiments might be.

Pale and speechless with grief, Francesca crept away, prayed for a time in her own little oratory, and then persuaded some one (her mother, good woman, seems to have accepted Paolo's ruling and never raised a voice in protest or consent) to accompany her to Santa Maria Nova to lay the case before her confessor, in whom she hoped to find a sustainer of her cause. It was a terrible blow to her to learn, after a little soothing talk and good counsel, that Don Antonio was evidently inclined to think that her vocation lay, not in following her own inclinations, but in obeying her father at this time. Without pronouncing absolutely for the marriage, he explained to her, most gently and tenderly, that while her aspirations after the life of perfection were certainly pleasing to God, yet the sacrifice of her own will in their regard would be more pleasing still. The good priest was certainly inspired by Heaven when he ended by saying to the weeping girl, "God claims your will, that He may mould it into entire conformity with His own. For works may be many and good, my daughter, and piety may be fervent, and virtues eminent, and yet the smallest leaven of self-love or self-will may ruin the whole. . . . Have but one thought, the good pleasure, the sweet will of God. . . . Lay down your wishes as an oblation on His altar; give up that high-

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est place which you had justly coveted; take the lower one which He now appoints you; and if you cannot be His spouse, be His loving and faithful servant."

Francesca knew now what her road was to be. She returned home and spent days in fasting and prayer, seeking for the strength to make her sacrifice generously and unreservedly. Her father, wisely perhaps—perhaps because he was still angry—left her alone for a time, but when he sent for her to repeat his commands, Francesca came, assured him of her willingness to obey, and humbly begged forgiveness for her former insubordination.

One can imagine how cheerfully that was granted. Then nothing was thought of in the house but the preparations for the wedding. It is difficult to understand how the parents of such a child could contemplate that wedding with joy, for it meant that Francesca would be absorbed body and soul into her husband's family, and that the home her sweet presence had brightened for twelve years would scarcely see her again. But the times were evil and full of dangers, and doubtless the father and mother felt that in finding a husband at once powerful, high-principled, devout and kind, for their darling, they were doing everything that in them lay to secure her safety and happiness. From the time she left them to enter the Ponziani family there is but the scantiest notice of them in the contemporary chronicles.

From the moment when Francesca consented to the

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marriage no one ever heard her say a word of regret or allude in any way to the holy dream she had renounced for obedience' sake. She must have been dazed, poor little thing, by the tremendous preparations for the marriage, by the splendid stuffs and rich jewels which henceforth were to be her daily wear. It was a matter of pride to furnish the bride, when she was to leave her father's house, with clothes and house-linen and hangings sufficient to last the rest of her natural life. In the case of an only child and an heiress, like Francesca, the wedding outfit must have been a joy and a nine days' wonder to all the female friends of the family; rolls of gold—shot tissues, of heavy silks and finest wools—these scarlet, and soft as velvet; caps and wimples stiff with gold and jewels; rare furs for winter wear and for bed coverings; embroidered hangings for beds and windows—rich vessels of gold and silver for the table, and countless piles of the pure smooth home-woven linen, with the handmade lace and running silk embroidery which is not yet a lost art in Italy.

Speaking of embroideries, I remember once walking into a friend's sitting-room and finding it nearly filled with something she had just unearthed from an old dower chest in the attic. It was intended to spread over a bed—one of those enormous mediæval beds where seven or eight persons could sleep without becoming much aware of one another. The foundation was of the finest hand-

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woven linen, yellowed by age to the colour of ripe cream, and the whole vast surface was diapered with minute stitchings of white silk. This sheeny background had then been embroidered all over with masses of carnations shading from deepest crimson to pale pink and primrose, and the foliage of soft greens was all picked out with gold, still pure and untarnished after lying for centuries out of sight. How many hundreds of hours some dead-and-gone great lady and her handmaidens must have worked over the marvel! And my friend told me it was only one of several that she had discovered in the family stores. There could have been no lack of occupation for women in those early days. Every great house had its band of nimble-fingered maids who were expected to devote just so many hours a day to spinning and weaving and embroidering, always under their mistress' eyes. In the house I am speaking of the mediæval arrangements for the women's safety and welfare had not been altered when my friend took up her abode there as a bride. The "women's room" was a large hall, very wide and high, to which the only ingress was through the bed chamber of the lady of the house. It was on a lower level than that room, and from the one small door a flight of steps led down into it. Here they worked, here their food was brought to them; when their service in other parts of the house was completed they had to return hither; at night Madame of the olden time counted them like sheep,





THE CAPITOL, WHERE COUNT TROIA AND HIS KNIGHTS WAITED FOR  
FRANCESCA'S LITTLE BOY





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and when the last had gone through she locked the door and put the key under her pillow. But seeing that young maids are wily, tricky creatures and might possibly indulge in fun and mischief if unwatched, there was a window in the wall beside Madame's bed, through which she could look down into their prison at any hour of the night or day!

But we must return to our little Roman girl. A marriage was a marriage in Francesca's times. The feasting and rejoicing was begun in the bride's house, and after some days of this she was solemnly taken to that of her bridegroom, where the whole round of festival was gone through again. The Palazzo Ponziani was situated in Trastevere, the most Roman part of Rome, and, from all the chroniclers tell us, was furnished with every ornament and comfort that man could devise in the fourteenth century. Here the child-bride became the centre of attention for the time, and had to sit hour after hour and day after day, receiving the visits and congratulations of the ladies of Rome. We are told that she carried herself with much dignity and sweetness, and that when the time came for her to return the visits she did so with such a charming grace that every one was delighted with her. But her young heart ached for the peace of a life that was ended forever, and all the fun and gaiety found but a very superficial answer there. Her bridegroom, his father and mother, and the other

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members of the family became devotedly attached to the beautiful girl whose one wish seemed to be to please them in all things, and only one person, Vannoza, the wife of Lorenzo's elder brother, Paluzzo, divined the inward struggle through which Francesca was passing. When they two would sit together for a little, hand in hand in the embrasure of a window at the end of a day filled with occupations which most girls would have called pleasures—when the twilight stole the crimson from the sky and the stars came out in the dark blue overhead—then the very silence spoke their thoughts to one another, for at heart they both loved and longed for higher things and only bore with the world gladly because the Lord had set their young feet there Himself and had bidden them seek Him in its ways.

But at last the thoughts found words. A half sigh—a gleam of tears—who knows now what the signal was, but Vannoza, with some tender caress surely drew the small bright head to her shoulder when she said, "Tell me, little sister—what is your sorrow? Will you not let your Vannoza share it?"

Then Francesca told her all that was in her heart; how hard she found it to give so much of her time to the world, to have to live in a tumult of dissipations, when all her being yearned for God, and God alone.

What was her joy, her surprise, when Vannoza replied with a like cry! "Beloved little sister," she said, "that too

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is what I long for and most earnestly desire! The world has no more attraction for me than it has for you. Let my sympathy console you! Let us be friends. I will help you in every way to lead the life you desire, and together we shall reach our goal!"

Never was promise more royally kept. From that day forth the two girls were one in heart and soul for thirty-eight years, and until death separated them at last, Vannozza's love, Vannozza's loyalty, were the greatest comfort and support to Francesca in the unheard-of trials that she was called upon to endure.

It must not be imagined that this passionate love of God, which they shared, was anything but a spur to them both to fulfil more scrupulously and completely the duties which He Himself had laid upon them. Not only were they both married women whose first business was the happiness of their husbands in this world, and, bound up in that, their salvation in the next; this last no easier task in those days than now, for the temptations thrown in the way of rich, light-hearted, handsome young men were, if less subtle, certainly quite as alluring in the fifteenth century as in the twentieth; but besides having to prove themselves charming and pleasant companions to Paluzzo and Lorenzo, ever ready to smile and fall in with their wishes, Vannozza and Francesca had to be equally smiling and ready to please and wait upon the all-powerful head of the family and his rather autocratic spouse. The

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father and mother-in-law now stood to the two girls in the place of their own parents and had, as we know, rights which would make the most dauntless maiden think twice about marriage did those conditions exist now.

Strange to say, through all the upheavals of six hundred years, it is only in the last few decades that the Roman unwritten law, as old as the Rome of Romulus, has been modified in this respect. The family was all—the individual, excepting the one head and lord for the time, nothing. The system worked well and smoothly on the whole, in its day; now that this is over it is rather pathetic to witness the dismay of the elders, who believed it would last forever, when their grown-up children respectfully announce that they claim the right to decide for themselves in the most important matters of their lives.

Such independence would have appeared simply impious to Vannoza and Francesca Ponziani. So they set themselves the heroic task of leading lives of constant meditation and prayer in the heart of a big, sociable, worldly household where neither of them had a right to a moment of her time if some one else chose to claim it. The miracle is that they succeeded. Vannoza had promised to help Francesca, and, as the wife of the eldest son, could doubtless make things a little easier for her in some ways; but the truth is that the younger girl helped the elder far more than either of them imagined. Ever since she was a tiny child Francesca had lived by a divine



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rule, not laid down for her in so many words, but growing spontaneously with the growth of her being, where, from the first moment of conscious reasoning, the spiritual claimed jurisdiction over the material element. It was no peculiar thing that the first words she ever pronounced should have been the names of Jesus and Mary; that is the case with most Italian babies; but the clearness of her intellect was very surprisingly manifested when it was found that she learnt to read at the same time that she learnt to speak, and this apparently without the slightest effort. Before she could pronounce distinctly she said every day the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin—that flower and fragrance of praise and prayer—at her mother's knee, and this devotion she never omitted her whole life long. From the time she was six years old she never touched animal food, or wine, or sweetmeats; she lived entirely on bread, vegetables, and water; yet her health seems to have been perfect, and to her last day she was enabled to sustain labours and fatigues of the most extreme and wearing kind. Her devotion to the poor and suffering were the natural outcome of her love of God; her mother encouraged her in the exercise of numberless charities, and long before Lorenzo Ponziani made her his bride her name was spoken in benediction in her native city.

She was born to be a saint, but she only became one by her own generous correspondence to grace. The crown

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of heroic virtue is never forced upon a soul. Its beauty is revealed, the promise of assistance made clear and faithful; but the actual winning will always remain a matter of personal will and courage.

Undaunted by the distracting conditions of her new life, the little wife gave up none of the devotions and austerities she had practised at home. But her prudence and sweetness, and her earnest wish to please her husband taught her how to carry them out without ever offending the sensibilities or interfering with the comfort of the rest of the family. With joyful alacrity she dressed herself in the gorgeous robes and precious jewels that Lorenzo loved to see her wear, and from her bright smiling face and gay voice no one would have dreamed of the hair-shirt which the cloth of gold concealed. At a few things she drew the line, but so amiably that none could feel offended; she would not dance, or play cards, or sit up late. The times were pretty free, and the talk, as we know, apt to become exceedingly broad in moments of gaiety, but it is recorded that there was in Francesca a strangely overawing purity, so that it seemed impossible to utter a free or licentious word in her presence. Her husband's parents put no obstacle in the way of her weekly visit to Don Antonio at St. Maria Nova for confession and communion on Wednesdays, and she had, too, the great joy of long talks with a learned and holy Dominican, the Prior of San Clemente, who was her father-in-law's

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intimate friend and came to see him every Saturday. Her refusal to sit up late at night, judged a wise measure for one of her tender age, enabled her to rise early in the morning and thus make time for prayer before the rest of the household was astir.

Naturally, outside the family circle, there were found—as where are they not found?—persons who declared that the whole thing was ridiculous, unnatural! Francesca Ponziani was a little fool, a fanatic—if not a hypocrite; and these wise people, out of pure benevolent interest in his affairs, took upon themselves to tell Lorenzo that it was his duty to bring his wife to a more reasonable frame of mind. The other world was all very well—in its place—but young people's business was chiefly with this one. Indeed, he ought to put a stop to his wife's "eccentricities"!

But, to their amazement, young Lorenzo, who was not at all spiritually minded himself, received their advice with cold anger. He adored his little bride and thanked God for her sweetness and holiness every day. It was not for him to interfere between the Creator and the precious being at his side. He only wondered that she should ever have been bestowed upon his unworthy self!

So the devil's advocates had to depart, shaking their heads and bewailing the dreadful pity of it all! There are so many of their way of mind in the world now that one may well hesitate before attempting even a sketch of

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such a supernatural life as that of St. Frances of Rome. It seems almost sacrilegious to describe the way, *aspra e forte* by which Providence led her pure soul—for the benefit of scoffers and unbelievers to whom nothing is sacred. The studies of such lives which we have published in former books have drawn down upon us letters filled with the vilest abuse of the writer and the subjects, letters which arouse amazement as to the mental standing of the men and women who are not ashamed to use the post as a vehicle for stuff which, if printed, would render them liable to the law; but since in life our Saints faced like insults and hostilities with unruffled meekness, and since, thank God, there are thousands who have testified to their pleasure in having some of these remote glories made more accessible to modern apprehension—as if some mysterious and beautiful portrait stepped down from its high place in church or gallery and walked awhile beside them on the rough highway of life, speaking familiarly of the things that Christians love and long for—we have put the scruples aside, and will hope that the story of Francesca Ponziani, as we try to tell it, will encourage those who in the midst of crowding duties and social claims are trying to keep very close to God. The tale must be necessarily much abridged, for the long years it covers were crowded with incident, and every incident seems to have had its counterpart in some overwhelming spiritual grace. It is as if the Creator had resolved to

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show in this gentle, obedient soul, what triumphant grace can do when it is not obstructed, when the object of it fears no sacrifice, accepts no praise, counts itself as nothing, and the Divine Will as all.

There is another reason why the story of Francesca should appeal to many who are lovers of Rome. In the minutely detailed account written immediately after her death by Father Mattiotti, her confessor for the last ten years of her life, one is struck by the fact that there is scarcely a part of the Rome of that day which she did not traverse again and again on her errands of charity and devotion. How many times she and her faithful Vannoza walked from one end of the city to the other to beg alms for their poor and to pray for sinners! It is said that once, when Francesca had been called away numberless times from reading her office and had always returned to take it up at the same verse—with the same result—that the last time she came back to it an angel had written out the response in gold; surely her little footprints between St. Peter's and St. John Lateran, between the Ponziani Palace and Santa Maria Nova, and the hospitals where she nursed her plague-stricken fellow citizens so tenderly, are all picked out in gold in the eyes of the Angels now. And how many a deed of wickedness must have been forgiven, what worse disasters spared to the turbulent, afflicted city for this little "Romana di Roma's" sake!



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The first epoch of her married life, when she was still the bright darling of the whole house and scarcely more than a child in years yet, closes with a strange and mysterious illness which defied the medical knowledge of the day and kept her for a whole year in acute suffering and hovering close to death. There were long periods when she was deprived of speech and seemed almost dead already. The despair of Lorenzo and his family was heart-rending. Paolo Bussa was distracted with the thought that Heaven was punishing him for forcing his daughter's inclinations in the question of her marriage. Once, during her hours of apparent unconsciousness, some friends, who (like many others of their day) believed in the power of magic and incantations, secretly introduced into Francesca's room a woman who was famous for her proficiency in the Black Art, in order that she might remove the spell which they believed had been laid on her. But the moment the woman entered the apartment, her true character was revealed to Francesca. Dying as she appeared to be, she raised herself in her bed and cried, in a voice ringing with indignation, "Begone, thou servant of Satan, nor ever venture to enter these walls again!"

The disguised witch fled, terrified, and Francesca fell back on her pillows in such deathly faintness that those who wept beside her thought her spirit had passed—that her last breath had gone to defend the honour of her Lord. As night came on a flicker of life returned, though with

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no sign of consciousness. All through this year of illness she had frequently received the Sacraments; her soul was a thousand times ready for Heaven; certain that this was the last eclipse and that Francesca would never look at her or speak to her again, the broken-hearted Vannozza left the room and threw herself upon her bed to wrestle alone with her grief. In that silent chamber of death the women who had watched for many nights past fell asleep, and Francesca, fully conscious and suffering agonies of pain, but unable to give a sign of life, lay waiting for the end, alone.

Her love had never failed; every pang had been offered to God, every conscious glance had rested on the Crucifix; surely now He would let His little one go home?

It was the Eve of the Feast of St. Alexis and God had chosen that day to open the chapter of marvels which henceforth set Francesca apart in the highest and hardest paths of the mystical life. I can not better describe the event than in the words of the writer<sup>1</sup> who first made that life accessible to the modern reader.

"The whole house, and apparently the city also, was wrapt in slumber; for not a sound marred the stillness of the hour—that stillness so trying to those who watch and suffer. Suddenly on the darkness of the silent chamber a light broke, bright as the day. In the midst stood a radiant figure, mystic in form and gracious in countenance.

<sup>1</sup> Lady Giorgiana Fullerton, "St. Frances of Rome."

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He wore a pilgrim's robe; but it shone like burnished gold. Drawing near to Francesca's bed, he said: 'I am Alexis, and am sent from God to inquire of thee if thou choosest to be healed?'

"Twice he repeated the words, and then the dying girl faintly murmured, 'I have no choice but the good pleasure of God. Be it done unto me according to His will. For my own part I would prefer to die, and for my soul to fly to Him at once; but I accept all at His hands, be it life or be it death.'

"'Life, then, it is to be,' replied St. Alexis, 'for He chooses that thou shouldst remain in the world to glorify His name.'

"With these words he spread his mantle over Francesca and disappeared, leaving her perfectly recovered."

The mantle of St. Alexis! The ragged cloak with which he had covered his face as he lay, day after day, a despised, unrecognised mendicant at the door of his own palace, accepting gratefully the scraps his own servants threw to him, abasing his soul in life-long penitence for a fault not his own! It shone like burnished gold now and spread healing from its folds. Verily "God's ways are not our ways, His thoughts not our thoughts."

On the instant Francesca arose and prostrated herself in fervent thanksgiving for the wonderful mercy of Heaven. Then she passed noiselessly through the sleeping house, and a moment later Vannoza, thinking she

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must be still dreaming, awoke to find her little sister's arms warm about her neck, to hear her whispering, "Vannozza mine! Vannozza, beloved!"

"Who is it?" asked Vannozza, mistrusting her own ears. "Am I dreaming? It sounds like the voice of my 'Cecolella'!"

"It is indeed your Cecolella, your little sister who is speaking to you! . . . You, my beloved companion, who day and night have comforted and consoled me during my long illness! Help me now to thank God for His amazing mercy!"

And then, as the first soft glimmer of dawn touched the window to an arch of grey, Francesca climbed up on the big carved bed, and holding Vannozza's hands in hers, told her all that had happened. And the growing daylight showed the two fair young faces, pale with awe, yet transfigured by an ecstasy of joy and thankfulness.

And as the light grew clearer Francesca cried, "Now, now the day is come! Let us not delay a moment. Hasten with me to Santa Maria Nova, and then to the Church of St. Alexis. I must venerate his relics and return thanks to him before the others learn what God has done for me!"

When the sun rose on that wonderful jewelled panorama that spreads before the terrace of St. Alexis' church, the first beams shone into the eyes of those two dear girls, coming out from their orisons, holding each

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other's hand, and still trembling from the direct contact with Heaven and its ministers. They could not but pause a moment to gaze at the glory spread out at their feet, the city lying like a mass of bland jewels along the river, only half seen in the sun-shot mists of morning, the *campagna* stretching far, far into the distance, one rolling sea of dim silver and gold, to the feet of the pale, ethereal hills, faint as the sky above them in the first magic clearness of a new-born day.

At that moment we may be sure Francesca's loving heart was scarcely regretting the heavenly playing fields. It was leaping back to the dear young husband at home, to the arms and the heart which were to hold her close for at least some happy years to come.



## Chapter Six

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### II

**I**N reading the lives of saints and heroes—more or less interchangeable terms—the things that appeal to one most are not generally those which made them famous, actions and triumphs far beyond the power or the vocation of the great rank and file, but the little touches by which we recognise their kinship with every-day humanity. If it is permitted to use such a trivial term I would say that the prettiest pictures of St. Frances of Rome are those which show her to us in her childlike enjoyment of beauty and nature, in her whole-hearted joy at being able to procure some unexpected pleasure for her friends. In a life wherein the miraculous is so astounding and so constantly present as in hers, one is struck by the little unasked wonders which flung out their sweetness on her path like flowers dropped into her hands—just the smiles and caresses that a loving parent feels impelled to bestow on a bright and affectionate child.

For in many ways Francesca was a child all her life, with a child's unquestioning faith, and also the child's de-

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light in building dream-castles where only what was beloved and sympathetic could enter in. And she had in all her aspirations and dreams the further most precious gift of sympathy and companionship; she was never lonely, for Vannozza was her second self, and Vannozza, recognising in her complete humility the extraordinary graces bestowed on her little sister-in-law, followed and supported her with unwavering devotion.

Francesca's miraculous recovery marked a new phase in the two girls' lives. "God expects more of us than heretofore," Francesca said, and they set about the attainment of perfection with tremendous earnestness. Three objects were to be pursued to the exclusion of all else—three objects that were really one, for the first being the love of God and the entire concurrence with His will, the others, a scrupulous unflinching attention to family duties and untiring charity towards the poor and suffering, naturally flowed from it.

In order to have a safe and quiet sanctuary when time was given them for prayer, Vannozza and Francesca contrived a little oratory in an unused attic of the Palazzo Ponziani, which they decorated with whatever sacred pictures and emblems they possessed. A few of these, however, were reserved for their out-of-doors church, a cave at the end of the garden, where in bright weather their orisons could go up to Heaven with the songs of the birds, the music of the fountains, the play of branches in

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the breeze. Here they were sitting one day, hand in hand, letting their fancy roam to the life which seemed to them so beautiful and desirable for those who could embrace it, a life devoted to God alone. How happy they would have been, they told each other, had they been able to live like the early Fathers in the desert, with nothing to distract them from praise and prayer!

Then a practical consideration presented itself to Vannozza, and she exclaimed, "But, sister, what should we have to eat?"

To which Francesca, nothing daunted, replied, "We should seek for fruits in the desert, dearest, and God would surely not let us seek in vain!"

The April day was waning, and the breeze that comes up from the sea in the spring blew softly in their faces as they returned through the garden towards the house. As they passed an old wall against which a fruit tree grew, something heavy and shining fell at Francesca's feet. She stooped and picked up a quince of extraordinary size and splendid colour, ripe as if all the suns of summer had mellowed it through and through. Another, exactly like it, lay on the path before Vannozza. They brought the fruits into the house and divided them among the family, who were overcome by the marvel, for never did a quince tree bear such fruit at that time of the year! But to Francesca there seemed nothing strange in the occurrence. It was one of Heaven's lovely little kindnesses, and

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Heaven was always about her path. Why should she be surprised?

Her crystal simplicity of soul caused her to see things as the Angels see them, and it was in vain that the Arch Enemy attempted to deceive that clear vision. Satan had not yet achieved his supreme victory—that of persuading the greater part of mankind that he does not exist. His attacks on Francesca were sometimes openly hostile, sometimes as subtle as those to which we are all exposed. One day when the family was all assembled in one apartment, an aged hermit, apparently emaciated by fasts and vigils, asked for admittance and was shown in. Francesca looked once upon his face, turned deathly pale, and instantly left the room. Vannoza, alarmed, ran after her, thinking she was suddenly indisposed. She found Francesca in their oratory, kneeling before the Crucifix, evidently in great trouble of mind. She would give no explanation then, but besought her sister-in-law to return to the sitting-room and ask Lorenzo to dismiss the hermit at once.

When this was done (for her wish was law to her husband) she returned to the circle, and, still sick and trembling with the horror of her first encounter with evil incarnate, told them that the visitor's true character had been revealed to her the moment she saw him. It was the Arch Fiend who had come, to try, by a few apparently wise remarks, to turn her and Vannoza aside from the

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path they were following—to inspire them with weariness and distaste for the hidden life.

And at this point in Francesca's life we come to the great barrier—always met in the experiences of the Saints—between the seen and the unseen; the natural, so-called, and the manifestly supernatural. We ordinary folk can not understand the mystic side of God's dealings with his intimates; many Catholics, heedless of the Apostle's advice not to be overwise in their own conceit, are secretly ashamed of the claims made on their faith by the all-but-brutal reality of the facts. Facts attested by thousands of persons—like that of Saint Anthony's preaching in Padua one day, and appearing before the whole population of a town in Portugal, to save an innocent man from the scaffold, on the next—terrify them. Such facts do not fit into the colour scheme of modern life at all, and, according to these timid Christians, are better suppressed than published. It is scandalous that the Creator should be supposed to intervene to such an extent in human affairs. The King is there to ratify laws and sign death warrants, but it would be most embarrassing to have him drop in at odd moments to help in household matters. Let Him keep to His sphere and leave us free in ours!

So far the half-Catholics. Beyond them is the great mass of the actual reading world, reading but unread in the true sense of the word; the public we writers want to reach and—in all humility be it said—help, by telling



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it true things and good things that we know. But the public, that will swallow greedily any silly personal anecdotes about great people, any old scandal wittily related, that besieges the libraries for memoirs that the censor should have suppressed, calls itself too "educated" to believe in the adventures of the Saints in their warfare for God.

"Tell us more about yourself," is the gist of many a letter that I get when one of my poor volumes appears. "That interests us—the Saints don't!"

Ah, my good friends, if *we* were really to tell each other about ourselves we should all fly apart in horror, society would fall to pieces at the revelations of baseness, selfishness, vanity, that we should make and receive. We all have our own wild beasts to fight—or propitiate—and the tale of those compromises would not be an edifying one. Why not turn our eyes to the elder brothers and sisters who were picked out, so to speak, by their Maker and ours to show us what human nature can become, even in this world, by never refusing grace? Can there be anything more heartening and inspiring than to follow the experiences of those dear things—hampered and handicapped quite as heavily as we are—and see how they won out by sheer faith and pluck and humility? Saint Ignatius, lying on his couch at Pampeluna, cursing his life because the shape of his beautiful leg had been spoilt by a wound, setting his teeth and having the protruding bone

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sawed off to restore it—asks for a novel to while away the weary hours of convalescence. There are no novels in the old castle; some one gives him the "Lives of the Saints," and, although with furious disgust, he skims a page or two—goes on—reads the immortal stories—and cries, "What man has done man can do!" and henceforth every heartbeat rings to one march tune—"Ad Majorem Dei Gloria!"

So let me tell you a little more about my "Romana." You shall not be wearied overmuch with the spiritual experiences, with the visible assaults of him whom so many of you have chosen to erase as a personality from your mental *Almanach de Gotha*; we will just follow her a little way in her exterior life, so full of strange vicissitudes that only the corroboration of contemporary historians makes it possible for us of the twentieth century to grasp the conditions of the world in her day. Yet her life seems to present a compendium of woman's joys and sorrows, always the same from the beginning till now. Love and desolation, motherhood and bereavement, wifehood and widowhood, the extreme of wealth and the depth of destitution, all assailing the tenderest and warmest heart that ever beat in a woman's breast.

Francesca was sixteen when her first child, a son, was born. Here was a new legislator in her existence. Without hesitation she laid aside her devotions, her treasured times of contemplation, her charities where necessary, to

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devote herself to the little sovereign whom God had sent her. No hired service for him! To the dismay of the family she nursed him herself, a thing that no Roman mother of her class ever did in those days—and very rarely now; night and day she was with him, and long before what is called “the dawn of reason” he had learnt to obey, to restrain his infant tempers, to fold his little hands and look up to Heaven before his lips could frame the Holy Names which were the first words she taught him to pronounce.

The last is the sweet way of our Roman mothers still. Only a few days ago I was sitting with a friend who was holding her son on her knee—an imperious little fellow of less than a year old, with the blood of conquerors in his veins and “dominion” written broad on his baby brow. “Where is Jesus?” asked the sweet mother voice. The child cannot speak yet, but he looked up to the sky with a radiant smile and saw something there that held his whole attention, for it was some minutes before he stirred and even then his mother had to kiss him before he would lower his glance to earth again.

Francesca’s child was baptised, on the day of his birth, in the Church of Saint Cecilia—the older church of which few vestiges remain above ground now. He was christened Giovanni Battista. His birth was a great joy to the whole family, of course, but to no one more than to Francesca’s father, Paolo Bussa, who exclaimed, when the

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little one was put into his arms, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace!" His earthly hopes were all fulfilled, his cherished little daughter was the light of her husband's eyes, the idol of her adopted family; and with the birth of the son and heir she had given the Ponzianis the one thing they still desired of her. Her father had no more to ask of life, and his cry of thanksgiving was heard, for he died within a few days, in great peace. His daughter felt his loss greatly at the time, but later, when the storms of disaster broke over Rome and especially over the Ponziani family, the thought of that untroubled death must have brought her much comfort.

She was barely seventeen when her mother-in-law was also taken away, and a family council, consisting of her father-in-law, her husband, and her husband's brother, decided that Francesca was to take over the government of the household. Her prudence, firmness, and gentleness, in their view, indicated her for the responsible post. Francesca protested vehemently; she was too young and inexperienced for such grave duties, she said, and pointed out that they fell naturally to Vannoza who was older than herself, as the wife of the eldest son. But Vannoza supported the ruling of the men. She utterly refused to be the mistress; all she wished was to second and obey her beloved Francesca.

So behold the slim girl, her baby on her arm, an immense bunch of keys dangling from her girdle, moving

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about the great house, distributing the duties of the day—so many maids to the spinning and weaving, so many to the laundries; giving out the day's provisions from the storerooms, taking count of the wine and oil, the corn and meat and fruit brought in from the country estates; watching that the grooms did not cheat the horses of their food in the stables and did not use bad language or make love to the women servants indoors; remembering her men's tastes in food and drink; and feeling all the while responsible for the physical and moral welfare of every soul in the great populous house! It was what we should call a large order even for a mature and experienced house-keeper; Francesca, relying on God's help, took it up and carried it out with perfect success.

There must have been moments when it lay very heavy on her young shoulders; she had to be nurse to all in sickness, counsellor and ruler in health. Vannozza, gentle and clinging, had not Francesca's high intelligence and courage. More than once the latter, finding that her patient for the time, in spite of all her care and nursing, was on the point of death, had to go out alone in the dead of night to fetch a priest to speed the parting soul. And the lowest servant in the house was tended by her as if her own brother or sister had been the invalid. All this served doubtless to brace her for the terrible period of famine and pestilence which visited Rome when she was about eighteen. The Ponzianis being exceedingly wealthy, their



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house was besieged by the poor of the city, who knew that so long as the provisions there lasted their share would be set aside sacredly for them. And so it was; Francesca gave orders that no single applicant was ever to be sent away empty handed. This generosity alarmed her father-in-law, old Andrea Ponziani, so much that he took into his own keeping the keys of the granary, a great attic in the upper part of the palace. Then, to make sure that the open-handed little housekeeper should not succeed in coaxing the whole provision away from him, he sold whatever he thought would not be needed for his own household, believing that the two girls would at least respect that. He did the same with the wine, reserving only one cask for his house's use. But Francesca and Vannoza, who were now indefatigable in nursing the plague-stricken victims of the famine, put their trust in God and went on giving away both corn and wine to the poor, gaunt creatures who lay, half dead already, about the streets. At last, however, fearful of entirely depleting the provisions for the household and having no more money of their own to bestow, their hearts wrung by the spectacle of the sick and dying, the two noble and beautiful women went out into the public places and begged, earnestly and with tears, alms for those who no longer had strength to beg for themselves.

There were plenty of other wealthy families in Rome, but at such times personal needs and personal fears assume

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colossal proportions in selfish hearts. So, while some gave alms, others refused and the refusal was made more bitter by the sneers and insults flung at the two gentle champions of the poor.

At last there seemed no more to be obtained, and, Andrea having prudently secreted their own little provision of corn, there was no more to be given. And meanwhile the terrible sickness cut down its victims by the thousand. The streets were encumbered with the dead and the dying: such aid as was given was wholly inadequate, and those whose duty it was to bury the dead were worn out. They could not remove the corpses fast enough. And so death bred death, and the sufferings of the sick were so awful that they were heard to reproach death for delaying to end their torments.

Francesca was heart-broken at finding herself incapacitated from helping the poor victims. One day, unable to bear the state of things any longer, she said to Vannoza, "Oh, let us go up to the corn loft. Perhaps we can find a little loose grain among the straw!"

So they went up, and a little maid called Clara, who loved them, went with them. And all three, on their knees, worked for hours, sifting the straw and gathering up every stray grain of wheat, till at last, quite triumphant, they had collected about one measure of the precious substance. Then they turned to descend the stairs, and on the threshold of the loft met Lorenzo, Francesca's hus-



ISLAND OF S. BARTOLOMEO, ROME; SITE OF THE LAZARETTO FOR THE PLAGUE  
IN FRANCESA'S TIME



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band, who had come to look for her. He opened his lips to speak—then stood dumb, gazing into the attic on which the women were turning their backs. It was piled high with golden grain, so rich and shining that, as Francesca's biographer says, "It seemed as though it had been raised in Paradise and reaped by the angels."

She and her companions, still facing Lorenzo, were unaware of the miracle until he bade them turn and see it.

Yet this wonderful work of Heaven's favour to his wife and his sister did not prevent Lorenzo's being exceedingly angry, in true man-fashion, a few days later, when he discovered that there was no more wine in the cask reserved for the family use. Francesca had drawn on it for the sick and the convalescent till not a drop remained. 'As for her father-in-law, he burst out into bitter invective when he was made aware of what had happened; the elder brother joined in, and poor Francesca stood before her three men, silent and with bowed head, while they stormed at her for her senseless generosity. It must have been a very trying moment for Lorenzo's gentle little wife. Doubtless she was praying then, for as soon as they would let her speak she said, "Do not be angry. Let us go to the cellar. It may be that through God's mercy the cask will now be full."

Incredulously, yet yielding to her strangely compelling charm, they followed her, down to the dark cave-like



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cellar, and must have made a picturesque group round the great cask, some one holding high the brass *lucerna* so that the light fell on Francesca as she bent down to turn the cock of the barrel. Instantly they all sprang back, for a stream of generous wine burst forth, making a lake on the floor and spattering the onlookers' garments with crimson drops. Andrea seized the cup that always stood at hand, and when Francesca had filled it and he tasted the heavenly vintage it seemed to him that he had never known good wine till now. His old heart was warmed back to youth by the wonderful draft. With tears coursing down his cheeks he said to Francesca, "My child, all that I have is yours. Do what you will with everything I possess. Go on, go on without ceasing, to give alms since they have won you such favour in the sight of God!"

Far greater was the impression made on Lorenzo. Awe descended upon him. He, a faulty mortal, lord and master of this radiant holiness, this intimate and favourite of God! So far he had indeed tenderly loved and cherished her, but he knew that she made many a silent sacrifice for him, in wearing the rich dresses and jewels that he liked to see, in shortening her precious moments of devotion in order to be ever at hand to meet and sympathise with his wishes, his tastes. But when she was suddenly lifted in this way beyond the flaming barrier that divides the mortal from the immortal, when natural laws were reversed and these wonders wrought at her every prayer,

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her husband, young and sometimes thoughtless though he still was, realised that her life was on a plane he could not tread and in which she must be left free to follow her Heaven-sent inspirations. He would interfere no longer with the guiding of the unseen Powers.

So, when they two were alone, except perhaps for the little son, sleeping in his carved cradle close to his mother's bed, Lorenzo told his wife that henceforth she was free to follow the inspirations that should come to her; he wished her to order her whole life according to the instincts and desires of her heart. Whatever she did would be right in his eyes.

How gladly she heard him, how lovingly she thanked him! Ah, he was safe in giving that generous permission. Francesca's religion was not of the kind that turns its possessor from real duties to imaginary ones, that defrauds others to raise itself to fancied heights of contemplation and self-immolation. Her husband, her child, all who had claims on her, would be loved and served to the utmost extent of her capacities; but now the world, as such, need count with her no more. She was God's own, said Lorenzo—let her lay out her time as He bade her. There should be no more checking of her austerities, no carping at her long night vigils of prayer, no insisting of her paying and receiving futile visits. She could dress as she pleased; her husband had seen into her heart, and that was so beautiful that it eclipsed once and for all the

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golden stuffs and the precious jewels in which he had loved to deck her.

So, rejoicing greatly, Francesca, after taking counsel with her spiritual director, sold all her fine robes and ornaments and gave the money to the poor. For the rest of her life she wore a plain robe of coarse dark-green cloth, which seems to have lasted like the garments of the Israelites of the desert, for the mention of it crops up again and again in her biography, the last, nearly thirty years later, a piteous little fact. Francesca had patched the green robe successfully many times, but for the last patch, which had to be a very big one, she had not been able to find a scrap of corresponding colour, and, if I remember rightly, had had to content herself with a rag of canvas which somebody criticised most unkindly.

By that time the poverty was no longer a matter of choice; but when public disasters and distresses involved the fortunes of the family, there were two members of it already inured to hardship, in love with privation. Those stern preceptors, at least, had nothing to teach Francesca and Vannoza Ponziani.

Giovanni Battista was a sturdy little fellow of four years old when his brother was born. Francesca was just twenty, and rejoiced greatly over her second son, who on

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the day of his birth was baptised by the name of Giovanni Evangelista. He was a wonderful child; "resplendent in beauty, angel-like in all his ways," says the contemporary chronicler. He seemed scarcely to belong to earth, and, like his sweet mother, was endowed with the gift of prophecy and the discernment of spirits—reading clearly the secret thoughts of men's hearts as soon as he could speak. One day, when he was about three years old, a very strange thing happened. His mother, holding him in her arms, seems to have been standing in the porch of their house, looking out towards the street, when two mendicant friars approached, intending to ask for alms. Little Evangelista was accustomed to such visitors and eagerly held out his hands for the largesse which his mother at once put into them from the pocket of her girdle; as he gave the alms the child looked reproachfully at one of the friars, and said, "Why will you discard this holy habit? You will wear a richer one, but woe to you who forget your vow of poverty!"

The monk coloured and averted his eyes. Very soon afterwards he forsook his Order, obtained a Bishopric by simony, and perished miserably by violence.

One day Lorenzo was holding his little son on his knee, playing with him, kissing him—he and the child in a happy transport of fun and affection. Suddenly Evangelista turned deathly white, took up a dagger which his father had laid on the table and held the point of it to



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Lorenzo's side, looking up into his face with a strange sad smile. "So they will do to you, *Babbo!*" he said. The prophecy was fulfilled five years later when Lorenzo Ponziani was stabbed in that precise spot when attempting to defend the city from the troops of Ladislaus of Naples.

But "much water was to roll under the bridges" first, and one is glad to know that in spite of war and turbulence, revolutions and counter-revolutions, those five years held much happiness and brightness for Francesca and her dear ones. Evangelista was three years old when the baby girl came to take his place in the mother's arms and make one for herself in the mother's heart. She was christened Agnese, and the glorious young martyr of Divine Love seemed to have taken her little namesake under her especial care; it seemed as if no child could be more beautiful and holy than Evangelista, but in Agnese something was added—perhaps the appealing gentleness of her sex—perhaps a more perfect likeness to their mother's ethereal loveliness. To Francesca she came as the crowning gift, a spotless flower of light to be returned to the Heavenly Father without a stain. Francesca had watched over both her little boys with untiring love and care; but she seems to have felt that even more was asked of her for her daughter. Every dawning thought was to be directed to her Saviour; no rough word was ever to fall on her ears, no glimpse of sin or brutality was ever to bring a cloud to her eyes. For the little girl the home was the world;



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the sheltered rooms, the fragrant, secluded garden all that she knew of it except when her mother took her to church. And from the time she was a very little child Francesca taught her to regulate her actions, to work with her hands, to pray, or play, to keep silence, or read (for, like Francesca, she learnt to read unusually early) at stated times, so that all was orderly and accepted. Regularity and continuance mean so much in these little lives. We see it in the ease with which the Sisters of Charity and other religious manage crowds of children of the most varied and anything but angelic temperaments!

It was Francesca's dream that her little daughter should grow up to be a holy nun, devoted entirely to the service which God had not granted to her own childish aspirations, and a kind of vision that she had one day, while watching by Agnese's cradle, seemed to set the seal of promise on her hopes. She saw a dove of dazzling whiteness fly into the room, bearing a tiny lighted taper in its beak. It circled once, twice, then floated down and gently touched the baby's brow and limbs with the taper, and flew away. But the true meaning of the portent was not revealed to Francesca then. When that was shown to her, a few years later, she saw it through a rain of tears.

## Chapter Seven

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### III

**W**E are on the threshold of a new phase in Francesca's career, one torn with troubles, and in order to explain the fortitude with which she encountered them, a word must be said of her inner life up to that time. It is not our intention to give any complete account of the marvellous spiritual experiences and conflicts of that life. These were confided, as a matter of obedience, to her confessor, first Padre Savelli and later Father Mattiotti; the latter is described as "a timid and suspicious man," who for the first "two or three years kept a written daily record of all she told him," watching always for signs of pride or untruth, keen to detect the smallest trace of the fraud which false or hysterical devotees are apt to practise, sometimes consciously, sometimes, it would seem, unconsciously—their soul's integrity being obfuscated by the desire to be considered of importance, the most insidious and blinding of all temptations. At last Father Mattiotti, perfectly convinced of Francesca's humility and sincerity, and unable to combat the evidence of the miracles God enabled her so constantly

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to perform (and which she always attempted to conceal or explain away) was constrained to dismiss his doubts, and wrote down what he knew, on broader lines, finally after her death, composing a very full and complete life of the Saint. On this work all succeeding biographies have been founded, and, for persons who desire to read a short and popular, as well as scrupulously conscientious account, no better book could be recommended than that by Lady Giorgiana Fullerton, whose writings have delighted the Catholic world for two or three generations already.

As has been said, we now enter on a new phase of Francesca's career—one stormed by external troubles; and in order to comprehend the fortitude with which she met them it is necessary to glance at the conflicts she had sustained, the victories she had been strengthened to win through the preceding years—the school and drill-ground, so to speak, from which she emerged, armed, trained, and gloriously companioned to meet the fierce assaults of evil fortune.

For very soon after her marriage Francesca was able to realise, otherwise than by faith, the abiding presence of her guardian angel. He was not visible to her at that time, but the slightest fault or imperfection, whether of thought or conduct, he instantly punished by striking her sharply, so that others in the room heard the blow and looked round in amazement for the hand that had in-

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flicted it. Strange are the ways of Divine Love! Almost as subtle, to our human eyes, are the wiles of infernal hate, although, seeing, as we do now, the final triumph of the divine, we can not repress an amused wonder at the way the Devil wastes his time and ingenuity on certain predestined conquerors. We forget one fact—that the future is kept from him who was once “a bright and morning star” among the “thrones, intelligences and powers.” Hence how futile his frenzied attacks on dying Christians—for whom each assault repulsed means a greater measure of glory hereafter!

The Saints were chosen by God to receive extraordinary favours, designed, perhaps, less for their own sakes than for the edification and encouragement of mankind. But if any simple souls be inclined, even in all reverence and humility, to covet like favours, let them remember that each and every one was paid for by some new persecution from the powers of darkness; and let them thank the Divine Mercy that keeps them obscure—and safe! Happy in our appointed place in the great rank and file, we receive our orders and march confidently, shoulder to shoulder with our good comrades, glad to leave the plan of campaign to our leaders, but greatly heartened to courage and confidence by occasional glimpses of the glorious standards, reddened by the blood of heroes and inscribed with the records of a hundred victories, that go before and mark our phalanx to Heaven and earth.

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To counterbalance, as it were, the intense happiness which Francesca had in her children, the powers of evil were permitted to assail her with equally intense suffering of mind and body, agonies of pain, visions of terror, attacks on those she loved, particularly on her sister-in-law Vannozza. "I will kill Vannozza and drive thee to despair," the fiend cried to her one day, and Vannozza was seized by invisible hands and flung down the stairs before her eyes. It seemed as if Satan had in her case received the same permission as that he obtained in regard to Job. "Only her life thou shalt not touch—" yet again and again, so far as human apprehension could judge, her life was in such danger that it was only saved by a miracle. Through all these trials her faith never failed, but it was to be subjected to even more searching tests before she attained the place which was to be her portion ere she died.

As Francesca's biographer says, "She was of those chosen through much tribulation to ascend the steep path which is paved with thorns and encompassed with darkness, but on which the ray of an unearthly sunshine breaks at times. She was to partake of the miraculous gifts of the Saints; to win men's souls through prayer, to read the secrets of their hearts, to see angels walking by her side, to heal diseases by the touch of her hands, and hold the devils at bay when they thought to injure the bodies of others or wage war with her own spirit." But such heights of glory are not to be attained without propor-



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tionate suffering. "This kind," said Our Lord, "goeth not forth but by prayer and fasting." Prayer to be perfect, spells sacrifice in its most complete, far-reaching sense; and the fasting is not only bodily abstinence, though that is enjoined; it is the renouncing of every personal claim and desire, the conscious and deliberate slaying of self-love.

Up to the year 1409 the Ponziani family had suffered, indeed, like all the other inhabitants of Rome, from the public calamities of famine, pestilence, and internecine strife, but both their wealth and the peaceful dispositions which made them keep apart from the quarrels of the nobles had preserved them from feeling the full force of those disasters. Now, however, Lorenzo Ponziani, a loyal subject of Alexander V, the legitimate Pope, was impelled to come forward in defence of the latter against the aggressions of the Neapolitans, who, under their king, Ladislaus, had in 1408 obtained possession of the greater part of the city by fraud, and were holding their ground with the aid of the Colonnas and other nobles who found it to their interest to support the usurpers; and the condition of the inhabitants of Rome, trodden underfoot by the contending parties, was wretched in the extreme. Ladislaus, having declared that the Roman Dominions

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were now annexed to the Kingdom of Naples, withdrew, leaving as his military representative Count Troia, a cruel and violent man who made it his chief object to destroy the party which, adhering to the Pope, had refused submission to Ladislaus.

Four hundred years after Ladislaus' day, Pius VII, harried by Murat's alternate promises and menaces, adhesions and betrayals, was wont to exclaim, "*Sempre Napoli!*" Always Naples—the grasping, ambitious, and invariably treacherous neighbour, in whose eyes every storm that broke over Rome was a welcome event, furnishing the opportunity for a fresh attempt at obtaining the coveted dominion of the Eternal City. There were always traitors within her gates, who, either for gain or revenge, were ready to assist in her conquest by any one who could be expected to remain in power long enough to bestow the promised reward. But there were others whose loyalty was unshaken by bribes or threats and who were ready to suffer all things in the defence of the Church and the ancient liberties of the city.

Among these was Francesca's husband, Lorenzo Ponziani, and in the eyes of the usurpers he was a marked man. The rival of Ladislaus, Louis of Anjou, at this time supported the Papal cause, and his forces still holding the Castle of St. Angelo and the Leonine City, there were constant battles in its very heart. These forces were commanded by Lorenzo on one such occasion, and the

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fight, a very bitter one, was about to result in their triumph, when one of the enemy, recognising the leader, crept close to him in the press and plunged a dagger into his side on the very spot indicated by his little son five years before. The assailant rejoiced in his success, for Lorenzo fell, apparently dead, and was carried back to his home with great lamentation and mourning. The terrible news had been brought there immediately, and on receiving it Francesca appeared to those around her as if turned to stone. Her anguish could find neither word nor cry, but it was so plainly written in her face that it seemed as if death were about to strike her down before she could look once more on her husband's face.

But a moment later she had found strength to acquiesce audibly in God's will. Raising her eyes to Heaven she offered up her dear one's life as well as her own to their Maker, declared that she forgave the murderer, and went bravely forward to meet the sad procession. When Lorenzo had been carried into the hall of the palace and placed on the ground, she knelt down and laid her cheek to his in a last supreme caress—and some answering pulse in the waxen cheek told her that the heart still fluttered, Lorenzo was still alive.

Then her medical knowledge served her well. With inward implorings for that dear life she applied all the remedies she could think of, and sent some one flying for a doctor to care for the body and a priest to aid the all-

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but-departed soul. Until the latter came, she suggested, in the most simple and tender words, acts of faith and love, hope and contrition, forgiveness to the assassin and strong trust in the saving merits of the Redeemer.

The household was in an uproar, Lorenzo's men, in their clashing armour, striding about and vowing vengeance on the foe, servants and dependents wailing and weeping—any one who has witnessed the effect of a sudden catastrophe in a great Italian home can easily call up the distressing scene. Through it all Francesca, though unable to quell the outburst of the general grief, remained calm, concentrated, self-controlled. Her prayers and her love won the day; Lorenzo did not die, though for many weeks his condition was so precarious as to require attention at every moment, and his health for the rest of his life seems to have been much impaired by the wound.

A still more terrible trial was at hand for his faithful wife. The supporters of Alexander V and Louis of Anjou had been able to bring great force to bear on the Neapolitan army of occupation and its commander, Count Troia, saw that unless he retired from Rome at once he and his followers would undoubtedly be overcome. He, therefore, decided to evacuate the city, but, in his rage at the humiliation, devised a cruel means of recalling himself to the minds of its chief citizens. Among these none had excited his ire so furiously as the Ponziani family,

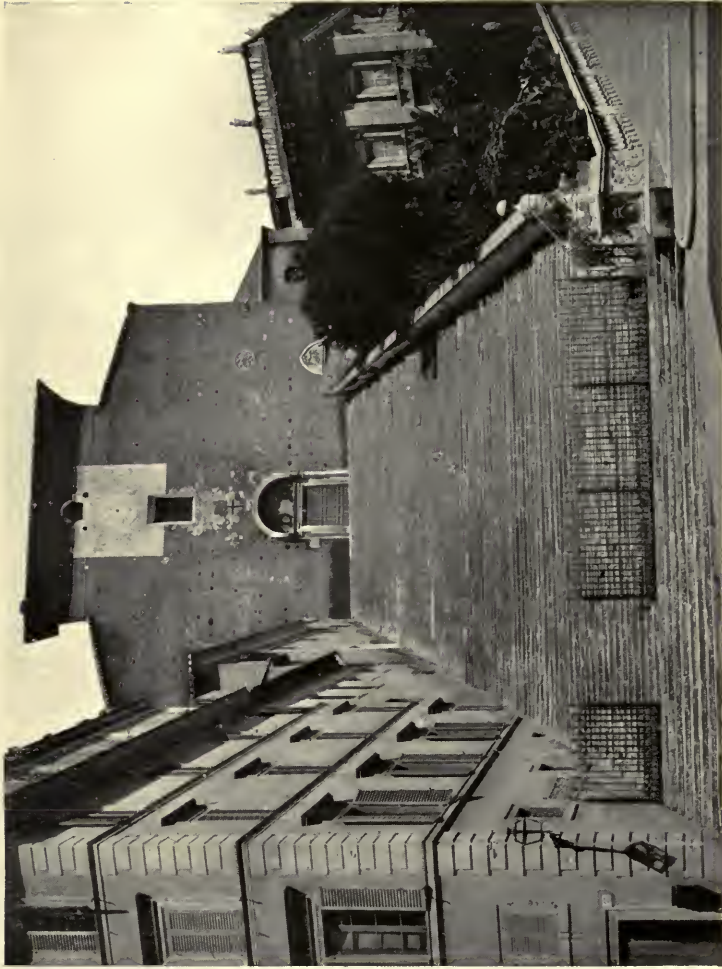
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and he resolved that they should regret his departure more bitterly than they had resented his presence. He began by arresting Paluzzo, Lorenzo's elder brother and the husband of Vannoza; and when he was in close custody sent word to Lorenzo that unless he handed over his own little son as a hostage, Paluzzo should be put to death.

Lorenzo was still in too critical a condition to be informed of Count Troia's barbarous action, and Francesca, unsupported, unable to take counsel with any one, was thrown into such an anguish of consternation that her very reason seemed as if it must give way. Seizing her little boy's hand she led him out into the street, and hurried along, through byways dark and dangerous, towards the most deserted quarters of the city—anywhere, so as to put him out of the tyrant's reach! How long she wandered, or where, she scarcely knew, torn between two griefs, that of leaving Vannoza's husband to die, or giving up her tenderly nurtured darling, her precious Baptista, into the keeping of the rough-handed, unscrupulous enemies of their house. Either alternative was too horrible to be contemplated; time was passing—every moment brought Paluzzo nearer to death, but the mother would not bring herself to save him by sacrificing her child.

Suddenly a tall priestly figure confronted the fugitives. It was Don Antonio, Francesca's confessor, in whose judg-





CHURCH OF ARA COELI, ROME, CLOSE TO THE CAPITOL. IT WAS HERE  
THAT FRANCESCA WENT TO PRAY AFTER GIVING UP HER  
LITTLE SON TO COUNT TROIA



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ment she placed implicit trust. She poured out her woe to the holy man, and he, illuminated by some interior revelation of the meaning of this trial, instead of sympathising with her, bade her turn back and at once convey the little boy to the Capitolin in obedience to Count Troia's command, and then betake herself to the Ara Coeli, the church which stands close by. Nature revolted for one moment; then, faithful as Abraham preparing to sacrifice Isaac, she obeyed, though it seemed as if her heart must break at every step. The decree had become known in the town, and everywhere the inhabitants who already regarded Francesca as a saint and who worshipped her for her all-embracing charity, pressed forward and followed her, weeping and lamenting for her and her child. The public indignation knew no bounds; the men declared they would take the little boy by force and carry him back to his father's house. But Francesca, strengthened now by the most sublime trust in God, would not permit it, but kept calmly on her way to the Capitol where Count Troja was waiting for the answer to his menaces. One can see the dark Neapolitan, standing on the high platform among his armed men, scowling at the pale lady and the golden-haired child as they toiled up those long steps to his feet, the crowd, frightened now, falling back in the Piazza below and calling down curses on this devastator of homes.

If Troia expected Ponziani's noble wife to abase her-

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self before him and entreat his clemency with tears and sighs, he was doomed to be disappointed. She gave Baptista literally into his hands and without a single word, without one look back in his direction, turned away and went into the church. There she prostrated herself before the altar of the Mother of Mercy, and, out of the fulness of her poor broken heart, made the most complete sacrifice that lies in human power. She offered, not only her eldest born, but her other children, herself, all that she loved and all that she possessed, unconditionally and forever to the inscrutable will of God. Then to her came peace. Enfolded in the will that is love, she waited, kneeling on in mute adoration and faith. Try as we may, we cannot outdo the Almighty in generosity. Down the golden dark of the great spaces there fell first a breathless silence, then a radiance faint and tender; the face of the Blessed Mother in the picture seemed to smile, to live, and in Francesca's ears sweet words were whispered: "Fear no more, I am with you!"

Meanwhile an extraordinary scene, of which no sound or hint penetrated to the church, was taking place on the Capitol. Count Troia had bidden one of his knights put Baptista before him on the saddle and ride away with the retiring troops towards the south. But when the boy, doubtless pleased as a child would be, to find himself mounting a powerful charger, had been lifted into his place, the great animal refused to move. Neither spur

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nor whip could make him shift a foot from the spot where his hoofs seemed to have grown to the stones. Muttering something about witchcraft, Troia ordered another trooper to take the child in charge—with the same result. Four different knights attempted to ride away with Lorenzo's son, and the four, one after another, gave up the effort. The moment Baptista was set on the saddle the horse under him seemed turned to bronze.

Then great fear fell on Count Troia and all his followers. "Let us have done!" he said. "Here is a foe we cannot fight. Take the child back to his mother!"

At that there broke forth frantic cries of joy from the dense crowd at the foot of the steps. Carried on high, with a surge and a rush, they bore the boy into the church and gave him into his mother's arms.

"Blessed be God!" said Francesca.

After the death of Pope Alexander V, a year after the events above recorded, Ladislaus of Naples, while the Cardinals at Bologna were electing a successor, took advantage of the interregnum to move once more on Rome. He had reached Velletri when, the election terminated, the new Pope, John XXIII, persuaded Louis of Anjou to join forces with him against the Neapolitans. The latter were vanquished—for a day. Then Louis, instead



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of pursuing his advantage, withdrew his troops. Ladislaus then made his submission to the Holy Father, who, deceived by his hypocritical protestations of repentance, made peace with him, and expected to see him at once prepare to return to Naples.

But such was not the ambitious young King's intention. The proffered peace was a mere blind to gain time to approach the city. Contemporary historians marvel that the Pope should have given any weight to his promises, and the people, seeing the Neapolitans advance unchecked to their very gates, believed that there was some understanding between the two sovereigns. This was not the case, as was soon shown, for when on the morning of June 8, 1410, Ladislaus' general broke through the crumbling city wall near Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and stationed a handful of men before the Lateran Palace, the Pope took horse and, with all his household, rode at full speed along the northern road towards Sutri and Viterbo, pursued unrelentingly by the troops of the treacherous Neapolitan.

The conduct of the latter when he entered the city constitutes one of the darkest episodes of the ever sad mediæval history. Scarcely any resistance was offered, yet Ladislaus gave up the town to sack more frightful than any it had ever suffered yet. The dwellings of rich and poor were burnt or torn down; the pillage spared no single object that could be carried away, and that which

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could not be removed was systematically destroyed. The sacrilege outdoes description; churches were first pillaged, then burnt, and the sacred vessels were used as wine-cups by the drunken soldiers and the degraded women who followed the army. The sacristy of Saint Peter's was emptied of all it contained, the basilica turned into stables where the raiders' horses were tethered over the tomb of Saint Peter. The slaughter was frightful. One cry of despair went up from the city, now a heap of ruins.

To Paluzzo Ponziani the news of Ladislaus' approach had been brought by trembling peasants, fugitives from the family estates which he harried on his merciless way. Consternation seized the household; Lorenzo would be one of his first victims when he should gain access to the city. Worn out with his long illness, and thinking perhaps that were he absent the King would deal less harshly with his family, he allowed himself to be persuaded to fly and seek refuge in some distant part of the country. Surely his wife added her supplications to those of his friends and was thankful to know him out of immediate danger. Yet, as Paluzzo was still a prisoner of the Neapolitans, she and her three children, as well as the faithful Vannoza, were left practically unprotected in their home, where even the provisions were running low in consequence of the crowd of peasants who had fled from their country estates to be fed and cared for by their feudal lord.

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How they must have prayed, those two poor women, when the children were asleep at night and the lights in the house extinguished so as not to call the attention of the roaring, bloodthirsty soldiers whose heavy footsteps out there in the street could be heard all night through as they reeled along in search of treasure or human prey!

Then a black morning dawned when a troop of Ladislaus' savages, drunk with wine and fury, broke into the house, demanding that Lorenzo should be given up to them. In all her terror, what a sigh of thankfulness went up from Francesca's heart for his timely escape! But she was to pay dearly for that relief. After searching in vain for Lorenzo and threatening to torture the servants to make them reveal his hiding place, they became convinced that he, at any rate, had slipped through their hands, and they wreaked full vengeance for the disappointment. Baptista, saved by a miracle the year before, was torn from his mother's arms and carried away. After that she probably took no more count of their actions, but she was to feel the results of them for many a year. The ruffians sacked the palace from roof-tree to cellar, and then tore it down, overlooking only one or two corners of it, in which, when the destroyers grew weary and departed, the broken-hearted women, with their maids and the two younger children, managed to camp through the hideous months that followed.

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We are not told how long Francesca was kept in ignorance of the fate of her son. Of all the tests to which her faith had been put this must have been the most terrible. But it is comforting to know that her prayers for him were heard, that he was in some manner rescued from his enemies and conveyed to his father, who, when peace was at length restored, brought him back to Rome. But nearly four years were to elapse before that became possible, years of great suffering of mind and body for Lorenzo's dear ones in their ruined home.

For after the sack of the city and the devastation of the whole country by the troops of Ladislaus, a fearful famine prevailed, and on the heels of the famine came the Black Plague, which ravaged Italy and carried off a great part of her already diminished population. The last visitation was scarcely forgotten yet when Rome became again a charnel house, where the living wandered like spectres among the unburied dead. The streets were encumbered with corpses, added to every hour by new victims who fell in their tracks. The few hospitals and lazarettos were crowded day and night in spite of the death carts that kept up a regular procession to and from their doors. And of the few who might have recovered a great percentage perished for lack of nourishment. I suppose we, of later and happier days, can not by any stretch of imagination picture to ourselves the state of a city in mediæval times under such conditions. Whatever else



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we have to complain of, those horrors at least are spared us.

The plague invaded the Ponziani home; one or two servants succumbed to it; and then it struck down Evangelista, the angel child, dearer than all else on earth to his mother's heart. He was now nine years old, and his supernatural beauty and holiness might have warned her that he was ripe for Paradise. But it was he himself, in all the throes of his sickness, who told her, in the most gentle and loving way, that the time had come for him to leave her, that she must not grieve over what filled him with joy, the knowledge that he was now to be united to the Blessed Saviour who had claimed every pulse of his heart from his earliest infancy. He told her that already he could see his holy patrons, St. Anthony and St. Onuphrius, coming to fetch him away.<sup>1</sup> With his last breath he promised never to forget her, prayed God to bless her and his father and "all who belong to this house." Then, saying, "Blessed be the name of the Lord," he crossed his hands on his breast, smiled once more at his mother, and was gone.

At that moment in another house in Rome a little play-

<sup>1</sup> Presumably St. Anthony the Hermit. St. Onuphrius was also a father of the desert, who for sixty years lived in the wilderness, praying for the Church then suffering violent persecutions. The legend says that he was the son of the King of Persia, who disowned him; that he became a hermit while still a boy; that his holy death took place in the desert, and that two lions came and scooped out a grave for him. His famous church on the Janiculum Hill was not built until some thirty years after Evangelista Ponziani's death, and nothing is said in the chronicles to account for the child's choice of such austere and aged patrons.



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mate of his, who had been ill for a long time and had lost her powers of speech, suddenly sat up in bed and cried out, gazing rapturously at some sight invisible to her attendants, "See, see, how beautiful! Evangelista Ponziani is going up to Heaven, and there are two angels with him!"

Francesca buried her darling in the family vault under St. Cecilia's Church in Trastevere, and then, without giving a moment to her own grief, set herself to do what was possible to help her suffering fellow citizens. She had almost nothing of her own to give, in the way of food or alms, but with signal courage she and Vannozza contrived a shelter in the one hall which still offered protection from the weather, collected such scraps of bedding and coverings as lay about the ruined rooms, and thus prepared beds, of a kind, for a number of sick people. When all was ready they two went out into the streets and brought their patients in, carrying those who were too weak to walk; and very soon their little hospital could receive no more. There the two saintly women tended and nursed the poor creatures through all the loathsome phases of the horrible disease, while with loving words and prayers they brought back to life many a soul long dead in mortal sin. But the sick had to be fed, and provisions there were none. So, when they had been tended so far as possible in the morning, Francesca and Vannozza went out—to beg. They joined the

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crowds of mendicants at the church doors; they went systematically from house to house in the great city, begging for bread, scraps of food of any kind, for cast-off clothing, even for rags which they afterwards patched together to cover the sick and shivering bodies. When they brought their sacks home the best of everything was distributed to their patients, and the driest crusts reserved for their own nourishment. Francesca restored many to health by her care, more still by the miraculous gift of healing with which God endowed her; a gift which her humility attempted to conceal by the use of an ointment she had composed of oil and wax and of which she always carried a little pot about with her. This she applied to the sick "whatever their disease might be," as well as to the wounded so often lying forsaken in the streets of the distracted city. A severed arm immediately restored, a foot mangled to a pulp yet made whole on the instant, new plague spots and old ulcers cured—these were only some of the marvels wrought by her touch, and it was in vain that she ascribed them to the use of her harmless balsam. Some sufferers she was not permitted to save, but those, by her exhortations, prayers, and encouragements, were helped to offer their sufferings to God and to die holy and peaceful deaths.

But another great result was obtained by the work of Francesca and Vannoza. The public was stirred by the heroic example of these poor ladies, denuded of every-

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thing themselves and yet saving so many lives by dint of undaunted courage and charity; the magistrates, shamed out of inaction, instituted many new hospitals and asylums, so that the general suffering was greatly diminished. But the scarcity that still prevailed was appalling, and it was at this time that Francesca began to make those little expeditions to her vineyard which, taken together with her extraordinary mode of life, called forth such fierce criticisms from the few friends and relations who were left to the ruined Ponziani family.

Everything was wanting in the famine-stricken city; from the devastated country no supplies came in, and wood for firing was of the first importance. So Francesca bethought her of what might be found on her little property near St. Paul's without the Walls, and on foot, leading a donkey, she tramped out thither day after day collecting faggots of dried branches and even withered leaves from the vines. These, she made into bundles, loaded them on the donkey till he could carry no more and started to lead him back, distributing the fuel to her poorest neighbours as she went. But this kind of work was new to the dear Saint; her bundles did not hold together properly and the load was not always well balanced. So, one day, after she had re-entered the city gate, the donkey stumbled, the bundles rolled in every direction and broke to pieces, and poor Francesca stood ruefully contemplating the ruin of her long day's work.

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At this moment a young Roman gentleman who knew her well came sauntering by and halted, transfixed at the surprising sight of a noble lady in such a predicament. But a true heart beat under his rich doublet. To his everlasting credit Paolo Lelli Petrucci ran to her assistance, gathered up her scattered spoils and loaded them on the donkey for her again. What struck him most, as he said afterwards, was the calm serenity with which she accepted his aid. No word of explanation passed her lips as she thanked him. From her unembarrassed demeanour it might have been imagined that gathering faggots and driving a donkey had been her natural occupations all her life!

## Chapter Eight

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### IV

ONE ray of brightest sunshine remained to Francesca through all these troubles. Her husband and her eldest boy were hiding in exile; her second son God had taken to Himself; but she had her sweet little daughter, Agnese, her small white dove, whom, through all terrors and privations, she had sheltered from harm, preserved in gay and spotless innocence, her last, dearest treasure, destined, as she believed, to be a bride of Heaven in a cloistered life on earth. But, although the future was often revealed to her where the souls or bodies of others could be helped thereby, her vision in this direction remained mercifully clouded until about a year after Evangelista's death, when its sorrowful glory was supernaturally made known to his mother.

He, through all that sad year, was never absent from her mind. With the eyes of faith she saw him radiant and safe in the heavenly playing fields, companioned by angels, praising God with joy. So she had never allowed herself to grieve over his loss or to wish her child back. She thanked God for his happiness and prayed that he



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might help and guard the bereaved little group—mother and aunt and wee sister—whom he had left behind.

One day Francesca was praying in her oratory, when she became aware of a soft radiance that grew stronger every moment and filled the place with light, and her heart, her whole being, with a flood of unearthly joy. As she gazed, out of its heart, a flame of light himself, her Evangelista stood before her, a thousand times more beautiful than she remembered him, a young child still, but, from shining brow to stainless feet, steeped in ineffable glory.

“My own, my own!” she cried, holding out her arms to gather him to her heart. But the mother arms could not clasp the incorporeal spirit. Only at the last day, when soul will be reunited to body, can hand clasp hand and kiss answer kiss. But the happy child eyes smiled back into hers as of old, and in answer to her torrent of questions Evangelista told her strange and wonderful things of the life beyond the grave, of his angel companions, of the incomprehensible and glorious destinies stored up for God’s faithful ones. Then, as her enraptured senses became aware that Evangelista was not alone, that a being who outshone even him in splendour stood by his side, he told her that his companion was one of the Archangels, whom God had charged with her guidance during her remaining years on earth. From

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Evangelista's lips she learnt that this bright spirit, far higher than himself in rank, would henceforth never leave her, and, moreover, by the loving command of her Heavenly Father, would always be visible to her eyes. But this stupendous favour must be won at the price of one more sacrifice, the last and greatest of all. Agnese's place was ready for her in the celestial home. A few days more and God would call her to it—and "mother" was forbidden to grieve, for it was pure Divine Love that was about to take the spotless little one from a bitterly sad world into Its own safe eternal keeping!

So now Francesca understood the vision of the white dove floating over her baby daughter's cradle. In her heart, so perfectly attuned to the mysterious music of the Divine Will, there was no room for selfish mourning. When Evangelista left her she had accepted the ruling without a murmur. The Angel stayed with her, and as night after night she kissed her little daughter he stood by her side, strengthening her for the supreme farewell that might sound at any moment.

But Agnese was not snatched away too suddenly. For a few days she drooped, and lay silent and smiling, in her mother's arms, while Francesca learnt by heart every line of the sweet little face, kissed one by one the golden curls that would soon be shut away from the sun. And then, smiling still and without a pang, with scarcely a

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sigh, the young spirit went on its way, and the mother held only its waxen sheath, to be laid in the same grave as the body of Evangelista, in Saint Cecilia's church.

“His stature is that of a child about nine years old; his aspect is full of sweetness and majesty, his eyes generally turned towards heaven. Words cannot describe the purity of that gaze. . . . When I look upon him I understand the glory of the angelic nature, and the degraded conditions of our own. He wears a long shining robe, and over it a tunic, either white as the lilies, or of the colour of a red rose, or of the hue of the sky when it is most deeply blue. When he walks by my side, his feet are never soiled by the mud of the streets or the dust of the road.”

Thus Francesca wrote when her confessor commanded her to describe the celestial being whom God had appointed henceforth to be her guide. She, who had all her life bewailed the corruption and sinfulness of her nature, found occasion in this extraordinary favour to humiliate herself still more profoundly than before. For now, she said, in the light of the Archangel's presence, she discerned a thousand new faults and flaws in her own heart, imperfections of which she had been unconscious hitherto. And the revelation while it increased

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so greatly her humility, inspired her to strive yet more ardently after purification and perfection.

This heavenly companionship was needed to sustain Francesca through the next period of her life, four long years of constant suffering of mind and body. Her own health gave way, and the fear of contagion had so crazed the Romans that every one of her household except Vannozza deserted her, while the few friends who found courage to enter the house only did so to load her with reproaches for having taken in the sick poor, who, they declared, had introduced the plague and endangered her own life. Gladly indeed would she have laid it down then, but that was not to be. For several months she lay hovering between life and death, and then recovered, to go through a still more terrible spiritual experience in which she was led by her Angel Guardian through the realms which Dante described, and of which the vision was so appalling that Francesca could never afterwards think or speak of the sights she had there beheld, without weeping bitterly. This revelation gave her greater power for good, enabling her to convert by fear many a hardened sinner who had been deaf to the call of Divine Love.

And then, at last, peace descended on the distracted city. Ladislaus paid the price of his grasping ambition and endless treacheries in a horrible and premature death. Lorenzo Ponziani was recalled from exile and returned,



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bringing with him Baptista, the one child left to him and Francesca. It was a sad home-coming, that return to his ruined house, where he would never see again the sweet faces of his younger children, yet to Francesca it was as if the sun had risen once more on her darkened life. One cloud still hung over it. Lorenzo had never laid aside his bitter resentment against a certain noble who had outrageously offended him in past years, and even now nourished thoughts of violence and revenge, as did his enemy. Francesca's prayers and loving exhortations at last touched both the angry hearts and she had the great joy of effecting a complete reconciliation. After the victory over his lower self Lorenzo understood many things which had been hidden from him before, and, withdrawing more and more from public life, refusing the honours and distinctions that were pressed upon him, he began to follow the steep path of perfection, helped and encouraged his wife in all her charitable undertakings, and concurred joyfully in the establishment of a permanent hospital in the Palazzo Ponziani. With the cessation of wars the estates he possessed in the country again came under cultivation and produced sufficient funds for the restoration of the home. But Lorenzo bade his wife continue the mode of life she had chosen, and nothing in her dress or habits (except the more generous alms she could now bestow) denoted the return of fortune after the long years of privation and hardship.



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Francesca could now devote herself more than ever to good works, among which, tenderly as she cared for suffering bodies, her highest efforts were put forth to save sick souls. And to this end she was granted the knowledge of the past lives of the poor wretches who, burdened with sin and crime, despaired of God's mercy and lay at the point of death on the verge of eternal perdition. No one will ever know how many the dear Saint carried over that terrible peril into safety—perhaps even she did not know, for in the long hospital wards her loving words and entreaties fell on many ears, and the very sight of her face, the sound of her voice, made mercy a fact and routed depression and despair, unconsciously to herself.

We cannot describe here the course of the Saint's inner life during this period. It was so far removed from our earthly sphere, so closely united to the unspeakable sufferings of the Saviour, lived in such close communion with the divine, that we must leave the account of it to holy and illuminated writers. But outward events, as ever, testify to its perfection. For us in the world it is safe to follow the axiom, "By their fruits ye shall know them," and just at this time a new development in the Ponziani home shows those fruits very distinctly. Baptista was now grown up, and his parents wished him to marry and assume the responsibility of carrying on and caring for the family. The choice fell on a beautiful and well-born girl called Mobilia, and very soon she en-

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tered the house as Baptista's bride. But, young, vain, fond of luxury and amusement, she took a violent dislike to her mother-in-law and to Vannozza. They had received her with open arms, and Francesca asked no better than to relinquish into her hands the whole government of the household. But this was not enough for the spoilt child. She professed herself outraged at having a mother-in-law who dressed like a poor woman and spent her time and money on "worthless wretches" belonging to the lowest classes in the city. And she voiced her grievances loudly, abusing Francesca and Vannozza on every occasion, mocking and humiliating them in every way, and declaring that their piety was all hypocrisy. The elder women realised that the girl was not bad at heart, that her head was turned by this great marriage and by her young husband's blind devotion—for Baptista was madly in love with her—and they bore with all her naughtiness patiently, never relaxing their own loving kindness towards her.

But Mobilia was to be corrected by other means. One day, as surrounded by her admiring friends, she was holding forth more angrily than usual on her mother-in-law's "intolerable and scandalous" conduct, she fainted away and on returning to consciousness was attacked by agonising pain all over her body. She was carried by Francesca and Vannozza to her bed, where she lay writhing in torment in spite of all the anxious care of the sweet

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forgiving women whose hearts were torn with pity at the sight of her suffering. But that suffering was her salvation. With it the light penetrated to her soul. As soon as she could speak she told Francesca that she knew why God had smitten her, that her pride and ingratitude had brought their just punishment, and she entreated not only her mother-in-law's forgiveness but also her prayers that her poor repentant Mobilia might never so sin again. Francesca took her into her arms and held her closely, and on the instant all Mobilia's pain left her. The short but sharp visitation was all that was needed to bring her to a better frame of mind. From that moment she was the most gentle and affectionate of daughters to Baptista's mother, and strove earnestly to fulfil all her duties to God and her neighbour.

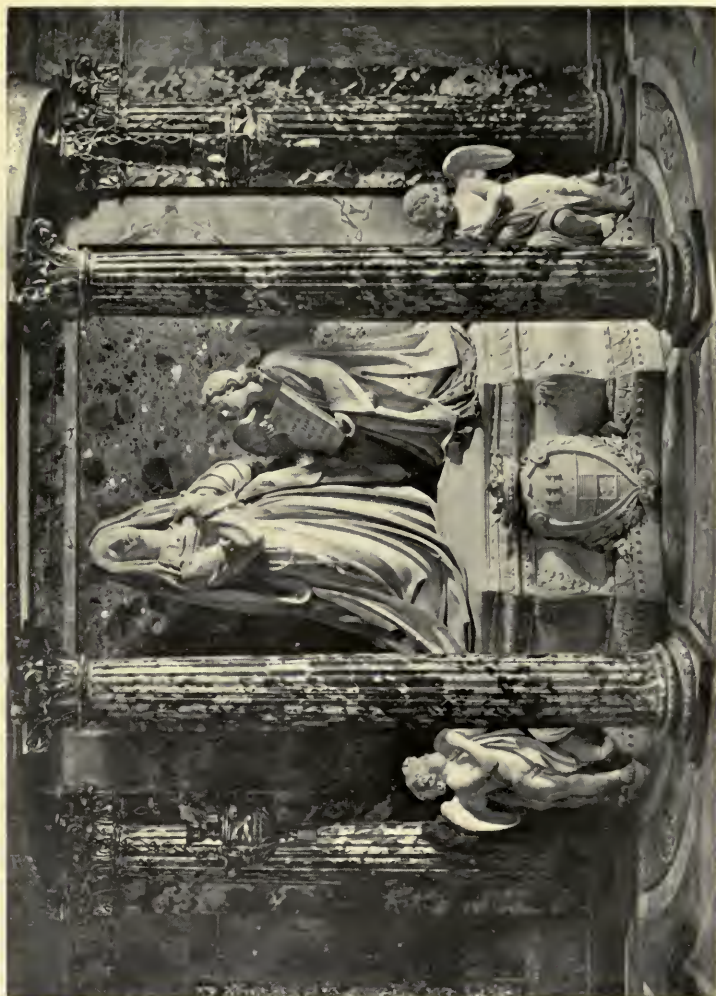
While Mobilia took upon herself a great part of the cares of the household, Francesca began to formulate a design she had long cherished, that of gathering together the most devoutly disposed of her friends into a kind of confraternity, the members of which, while still living in the world, bound themselves to serve God as zealously and carefully as possible. Her husband, who was daily more impressed by the miracles she worked and the extraordinary favours bestowed upon her, told her to follow out all her inspirations in complete liberty, the only condition he laid down being that she would never deprive him of her beloved companionship and precious

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guidance. She, who loved him so devotedly, would never have left him, and perhaps smiled at his thinking it necessary to make such a proviso. Indeed, the serious wound inflicted so many years before and the sorrows and privations which followed it had seriously affected his health, and his wife would entrust to no one else the task of nursing him and ministering to his wants. Yet she was very grateful for his spontaneous permission to divide her time according to her own inclinations, and the result was soon evident in the little company of ladies who, on the Feast of the Assumption, 1425, knelt with her in the church which now bears her name, to dedicate themselves to the service of the Blessed Virgin under the title of "Oblates of Mary." They took no vows, and no especial duties were laid upon them by their director, Don Antonio (who had for so many years been Francesca's spiritual guide), except frequent attendance at the Sacraments and the scrupulous exercise of works of mercy and of all Christian virtues. Francesca refused to be regarded as their Superior, but their love and veneration for her made them ask for her advice at every step, while they strove to model their own conduct on her shining example.

The following year brought a great happiness to the Saint, for, having obtained the consent of Lorenzo and Paluzzo, she and Vannoza, with the rest of their pious companions, made a pilgrimage to Assisi, to pray in the





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Church of Our Lady of the Angels, where the Blessed Saint Francis had had his first vision more than two hundred years before. The noble ladies made it a real pilgrimage, travelling on foot and begging their way in true Franciscan fashion, and were rewarded for their constancy and humility; for when they were already within sight of Assisi (they had timed their journey so as to reach it on the Feast of the "Pardon," August 2nd), and fainting with heat and weariness, Saint Francis, unrecognised at first, appeared to them, and began to speak with such wonderful fire and eloquence of the love of God, of Jesus and Mary, that they forgot their fatigue and felt themselves lifted into an atmosphere they had never breathed before. Francesca's heart burned within her; she looked at her angel—always visible to her, but so bright, she said, that it was only rarely she could look directly at his face, by the radiance of which she could write and read in the darkest night. Now she saw that still brighter rays emanated from him and, resting on the pale monk, enveloped him in a golden halo. So she understood. Then Saint Francis, in the tender compassion of his heart, after blessing the kneeling women, reached up to a pear tree by the wayside and brought down from it one pear of huge size and marvellous sweetness to allay their thirst. Then he was gone.

So, with great rejoicing they came to Assisi, and knelt where he had knelt, prayed for themselves and their dear

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ones and all mankind, while to Francesca came a sweet and glorious vision promising the help and protection of Heaven to all her undertakings. And then they returned, always on foot, to their homes and families in Rome "rich in all blessings that their God could give."

Father Faber said, "Long rest is the ground in front of great crosses." Francesca's happy pilgrimage and all the graces bestowed on her at Assisi were designed to prepare her for a heavy trial. On returning to Rome she learnt that Don Antonio Savelli, her wise and faithful spiritual director ever since her childhood, had died during her absence. His loss was a great misfortune to her at this moment when she was trying to organise her little company of "Oblates of Mary" and was especially in need of advice and support. After much prayer she decided to confide herself to the guidance of the parish priest of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Don Giovanni Mattiotti, a man of very holy life, but wanting in decision and energy of character and inclined, in spite of all that he knew of Francesca Ponziani, to treat her as a mere visionary—in fact, as we should put it now, to snub and discourage her rather unmercifully. Perhaps the humility with which she accepted his rulings and the undiminished veneration with which she continued to regard and obey him were stronger proofs of her sanctity than any other features of her whole wonderful life. In spite of himself

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he was at last convinced that she was chosen to do great things for God, and although the aid he rendered to her infant congregation was rather half-hearted, she had in time the joy of seeing it established canonically in the habitation which still shelters the community of the Oblates, at 'Tor de' Specchi.<sup>1</sup> Many obstacles had been raised, much opposition set in motion against the undertaking, so that some years passed before it was completed, and Francesca installed Agnese de Lellis, a woman of mature age and confirmed sanctity, as its Superior, she herself remaining in her home, the ever-loving companion and nurse of her husband, whose many infirmities and advancing age caused him to lean more than ever on the support of his beloved wife.

It was during these years that she lost the precious companionship of Vannozza, her life-long comrade on the path of holiness. Francesca had been prophetically warned of the event, and when Vannozza, strengthened and consoled by all that love, mortal and divine, could do to soften the last journey, passed away in her sister's arms, and was carried to her grave, Francesca could only thank God for all His graces to that dear soul and, passing into an ecstasy in which all beheld her lifted bodily from the ground, exclaim, "When? When?" again and again, in

<sup>1</sup>This being, precisely speaking, a private society of noble ladies living together without being bound by the ordinary religious vows, the property stands as belonging to private persons and has escaped the usual confiscation by the Italian Government.

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her burning desire to be united to Him Who had called Vannozza to Himself.

The ecstasy lasted so long that the onlookers feared her prayer had been heard and that she too had left this sorrowing earth. Then Padre Mattiotti approached and commanded her to go and attend to some sick persons, and instantly she came out of the trance and obeyed him.

As almost always happens after a holy death, spiritual favours now rained on Francesca; every aid and protection was promised for her little congregation, and she herself was given ever more marvellous and clear visions of heavenly things, while at the same time her gift of prophecy enabled her to warn the Romans of the punishments in store for them if they would not mend their ways, and cease to offend God. At that time comparative peace reigned in the Papal Dominions, but it was destined to be short lived. Martin V (Oddo Colonna), who had done so much to heal the dissensions which were rending Christendom in the beginning of his pontificate, died in the spring of 1431, and again Italy, and particularly Romagna, was torn with wars, carried on with relentless cruelty by mercenaries whom the contending factions summoned to their aid. The usual anarchy prevailed in Rome and the successor of Martin, Eugenius IV, had to fly from the city as so many of his predecessors had done. The Catholic world was threatened with a new schism, and Francesca, like St. Bridget and St. Cath-



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arine of Siena before her, was charged by Divine Providence with the mission of averting it. "The Blessed Virgin," says her biographer, "appeared to her one night, surrounded by Saints and Apostles, serenely beautiful, and with a compassionate expression on her countenance. . . . She intimated to the Saint that God was waiting to have mercy, and that His wrath must be appeased by assiduous prayers and good works. She named certain religious exercises and penitential practices which were to be observed on the principal feasts of the ensuing year, and urged on the faithful in general, and on the Oblates in particular, a great purity of heart, a deep contrition for past sin, and a spirit of earnest charity. She solemnly charged Francesca to see that her orders were carried out, then she blessed her, and disappeared."

Through Don Giovanni Mattiotti, Francesca made known the vision to the clergy of Rome, but they pretended to regard it as merely the dream of an over-wrought woman and refused to pay any attention to her recommendations. Don Giovanni then went to Bologna to lay the matter before the Pope. He listened with gratitude to the account of the vision and sent back by Don Giovanni the most stringent orders that the instructions of the Blessed Virgin were to be punctually carried out. When Padre Mattiotti returned to Rome, Francesca met him at Tor de' Specchi, the residence of her pious community, and before he could say a word gave him an exact rela-

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tion of all that had taken place during his journey, down to the precise phrases which the Pope had addressed to him.

The Masses, the processions of penitence, and other religious exercises prescribed by the Blessed Virgin were now duly performed, and very soon the promised results ensued. The council which the Pope convened at Ferrara and which afterwards continued its deliberations in Florence was effectual in overcoming the illegal assembly at Basle, and the schism which had torn the Church for so many years was healed for a time. Francesca's prayers had done much to forward the work which it had not been granted to her great forerunner, St. Catharine of Siena, to see accomplished while she was on earth, but for which, since her glorious death, she had surely been praying in Paradise.

Francesca's married life had lasted forty years when her husband died, after a long and painful illness patiently borne. She who had been his devoted companion through storms innumerable, who had never allowed anything to interfere with her duty to him, never left his side, cheered and comforted him to the last with her love and her prayers, and had the only consolation possible in her great sorrow, that of seeing him die a holy

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and peaceful death. When the prayers were all said and the earth closed over all that was left to it of the noble, kind-hearted husband who had never wavered in his love and loyalty to her, Francesca felt that her task in the world was accomplished. She could now withdraw from it to devote whatever remained of her life to God alone; she, who, ever since the dawn of reason, had kept her soul in a cloister of purity and courage and humility, could now become an inmate of the holy community she had founded and give every thought and action to the service of God.

Yet when she went to Tor de' Specchi she went in penitent's garb, with bare feet, with a rope round her neck, and, kneeling on the threshold in presence of all the Oblates, she avowed herself unworthy to be one of them, asked only to be admitted as their meanest servant, and would not enter until she had made before them all a general confession of the sins of her whole life. One is hard put to it to realise that she honestly believed herself the most unworthy and sinful of women. But her self-abasement was absolutely sincere. She who had lived in daily converse with God and His Blessed Mother, with His Angels and His Saints, had such a clear vision of the Divine Perfection that she could estimate, as we can never do, how far corrupt human nature falls short of that standard. The Sisters, overjoyed at possessing her at last, opened their arms to their foundress, and the Su-

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perior, Donna Agnese de Lellis, instantly laid down her authority, saying that as their real Mother had come to them, she must be now their leader and guide. Francesca would not hear of the proposition, but the Sisters obtained the support of her confessor, Padre Mattiotti, and in obedience to him she finally complied.

Her son Baptista and his wife Mobilia had resisted her retirement with tears and prayers, but she consoled them by reminding them that she would be always at hand should they need her help or advice, and that they could see her whenever they wished. They had children of their own now, and for many years Mobilia had ruled the household wisely and well. She wept bitterly at her mother-in-law's departure, but Francesca turned to her, saying very tenderly, "Do not weep, my child. You will outlive me and will bear witness to my memory." A prediction which was fulfilled when Mobilia was called upon to give her testimony during the examination which, with a view to Francesca's canonisation, was instituted immediately after the Saint's death.

The few years which were to elapse first were rich in good works of which the fruits remain with us to-day, richer yet in heavenly favours and graces to Francesca's pure and humble soul. But, as ever in the divine dispensations, they were accompanied by fearful internal trials and the last assaults of the adversary who used every menace and wile to weaken her life-long allegiance to



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God. When a new schism threatened the Church, she prayed to be taken away from the evil to come, and the prayer was heard. She knew that her end was approaching and wrote to a friend in Siena, who had made her promise to summon him to her deathbed, that he had better hasten to come to Rome. Just at this time Baptista had a sudden attack of illness and his mother flew to his side. He recovered almost immediately but he and Mobilia begged her to give them that one day and to stay till sunset. She was feeling very weak and ill when towards evening she insisted on starting out to return to Tor de' Specchi for the night. On her way she stopped at Sta Maria in Trastevere to speak to Padre Mattiotti, and he, noting her alarming pallor, bade her go back at once to Palazzo Ponziani (which was close by) for that night at least. She obeyed promptly but sorrowfully—she had wished to die at Tor de' Specchi, and she knew now that she would never see her little cell there again. The next morning she was too ill to leave her bed, and four of her dear Oblates came to be with her. She lingered a few days during which she was comforted and strengthened by many heavenly visions, and in the intervals of her ecstasies made most careful preparations for death, beseeching Padre Mattiotti and the others around her to omit nothing which could help her soul on that tremendous journey. But all was peace and joy at the last. She had told those who loved her that she would



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be called away on the seventh day of her illness, and towards dusk on the ninth of March the call came. Her face shone for a moment with new and unearthly splendour, her eyes lighted up with a very sunrise of joy. "What is it you see, my daughter?" Padre Mattiotti asked her.

"The heavens open—the Angels descend! The Archangel has finished his task. He stands before me—he beckons me to follow him—"

With those words her spirit was set free.

Many miraculous cures were wrought on the sick and infirm by touching her body or her garments as she lay on her bier. The worn, emaciated little body exhaled the most heavenly perfume; her face grew lovelier every moment with the reflection of the eternal youth she had gained in Heaven. The people of the city crowded around her, weeping and praying, and they refused to allow her to be buried for several days. At last she was laid to rest in her beloved Church of Santa Maria Nuova, where she had knelt beside her mother when she was a tiny child.

## Chapter Nine

### SIGNORA PISTOCCHI AND THE TRAGEDY OF THE BATHURSTS

**I**N the same year—1867—in which so many of one's friends and acquaintance were killed or crippled at Mentana, there was still living in Rome an elderly lady, Signora Pistocchi, whose maiden name was connected with a series of romantic and tragic events so remarkable as to be almost without a parallel.

By birth a Bathurst, Signora Pistocchi, who must have been about seventy years of age, yet retained much of the charm and the beauty for which her family is justly renowned. But with it all, there seemed to hang over her as it were a veil of incurable melancholy—which, considering all that she had suffered in early youth through the dreadful succession of deaths among those nearest and dearest to her, was hardly wonderful. For not only had the fate of her father stirred Europe from end to end with a shudder of indignant compassion and mystification; but those of her sister and her brother a few years later had touched the hearts of all the sympathetic Roman world more deeply perhaps than any other event

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since the cruelty of Napoleon to the Holy Father, Pius the Seventh, himself.

It was primarily the story of the death of Signora Pistocchi's sister, Rosa Bathurst, which for me, a Roman, was by far the most poignant of all; and which, as long as I live, will always return to my mind on passing along a certain lonely stretch of the Tiber bank between Ponte Molle, the Milvian Bridge, and the hamlet of Acqua Acetosa, about a mile to the north of the city from Porta del Popolo.

I have never, to my great regret, seen any picture of Rosa Bathurst, but from all accounts, she must have been one of the fairest of beings—"the angel girl," as she was known to those who had the delight of remembering her. It was during the Roman season of 1823-1824 that she happened to be staying with her uncle and aunt, Lord and Lady Aylmer, in Rome, as a girl of seventeen or so, fresh from England with all her life, as it seemed, before her, in the first flush of her youth and loveliness. And then, suddenly, as though she were deemed too exquisite a thing for earth, Heaven took her back to Itself with no more than a few minutes of anguished preparation for the swift journey to her abiding home.

On the afternoon of March 16, 1824, a perfect day of early spring, when the air was redolent with the scent of violets and the strong sunshine was warming all the world of Rome to new life and vigour after the winter, which

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had been rather a severe one, Rosa Bathurst, with the Aylmers and the Duc de Montmorency, the French Ambassador, were gathered together for a ride in the Campagna. It was at the entrance of Palazzo P——, where the Aylmers were living. As the horses—including Miss Bathurst's, which had come with her from England—were brought round for them to mount, it was seen that Lord Aylmer's was lame. Consequently it was sent back to the stables, and Montmorency offered the one that his groom was riding to Lord Aylmer, instead. The offer was accepted, and the groom was despatched to the French Embassy for another for himself with orders to rejoin the party at the Ponte Molle.

How often is it that the smallest causes produce the most signal results!—for if Rosa Bathurst's death was due to one thing more than to another, it was to this fatal change of horses on her uncle's part. It had been arranged that they should ride out of Rome in a direction where there was a good stretch of turf along the wayside which would enable them to enjoy a canter—if not, indeed, a gallop. But now Lord Aylmer, who had been ill, and was but just recovering, felt disinclined to take any but the gentlest exercise upon a horse to whose pace and manners he was unaccustomed. Also, I think he probably felt the sportsman's aversion to risking the limbs of a horse other than his own; a risk which, owing to his weight and the chance of De Montmorency's horse

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possibly crossing its feet through some defect in its build or action, seems to me to have quite justified Lord Aylmer in his decision.

At all events, it was settled that they should ride out by Porta del Popolo towards Ponte Molle; and so off they went, Rosa—if I may be allowed to call her by her Christian name—leading with Montmorency, and the Aylmers following. With them rode another girl who was a nervous rider and whose mother had entrusted her to good-natured Lady Aylmer's especial supervision on that account; and, last of all, came this girl's English groom.

After passing out of the Porta del Popolo, however, they decided to ride round by Villa Borghese and on past the Austrian College, instead of making direct for Ponte Milvio; the object of which was to give Montmorency's man time to rejoin them at the bridge. But, by the time they reached the spot where the road branches to the left from that leading to Acqua Acetosa, the keenness of the younger members of the party for a canter was such that Lord Aylmer consented to Montmorency's offer to guide them to where there was some galloping ground parallel with the Tiber; in order to reach which they would have to go through a vineyard by a gate. To their disappointment, though, this gate they found to be locked.

But Montmorency was not to be balked of his canter, and told the others to follow him to another entrance



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further on along the bank of the river which was in flood through the melting of the snows in the Apennines.

And so he started to lead the way along the bank which soon became so narrow as to compel the riders to go in Indian file for fear of their horses slipping down into the torrent of the swollen Tiber. By now Lord Aylmer had taken the precaution of riding immediately behind Montmorency so as to satisfy himself that the way was sufficiently safe as to be practicable for the three ladies. Next to him came Rosa Bathurst, followed by Lady Aylmer and the other girl, whose groom brought up the rear of the little procession. In those days the road, or rather, the bridle-path skirting the river, was only about a yard wide at this point; and, there being no parapet, every precaution was necessary to avoid an accident. Moreover, it wound a good deal and was overhung, here and there, by dense bushes which concealed the foremost riders, one by one, from the view of those in their rear.

First of all Montmorency disappeared from sight round one of these overhanging clumps, and then Lord Aylmer followed him at the place where the bank was narrowing to an edge that was only just wide enough for a horse to stand on it. At this juncture, Lady Aylmer, without looking round called out over her shoulder to Miss ——, behind her, to dismount—which the girl did,

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just as Lord Aylmer came back into view in front of Rosa Bathurst and his wife, to say that the road was better ahead, and that they need not be alarmed. Not that it would have been of any use for them to attempt to turn back; for that was physically impossible.

In the same instant, Rosa's mare seemed to have taken fright at the exceeding narrowness of the track, and tried to turn round in order to escape from it. And at that a cry of alarm broke from Lady Aylmer behind her.

"Don't let your mare turn, Rosa!" she called. "Keep her head straight, for Heaven's sake!"

Before the words were out of her mouth, though, the mare in seeking to avoid the thing which frightened her, had begun to come round—with the result that her hind legs went from under her, and she began to slide and slither down the low, precipitous bank into the swirling water, the while she struggled to get a foothold upon it with her fore feet. But all in vain; another few seconds, and the animal fell back, with its rider still in the saddle, into the swift waters. Instantly they were swept by the raging current into the middle of the river, far out of reach of Lord Aylmer who had flung himself off his horse and, without waiting to remove even his coat, now plunged into the stream and struck out towards where Rosa was calling to him, "Oh, save me, Uncle!—save me!"

At the same moment his wife had sprung from the

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pony that she was riding and had lowered herself by her hands to the very edge of the water where there was just room to stand. As she is said to have told some one afterwards, she heard a voice which she did not realise was her own, screaming to Montmorency to come back and help; but he was by now out of hearing, and never came back. Nor did she see him again; for the rest of her life she believed him to have fainted with horror, somewhere out of sight of her round the corner where the bushes hid him from view. My own belief is that he had ridden on and that, when he came back eventually, to see what had become of the others, he found no one there.

Once and yet again Lord Aylmer tried to swim to his niece, and both times he was beaten back by the current—as gallant an endeavour as ever I heard of for an elderly man in heavy clothes and but lately risen from a sick-bed. As he was battling with death, rising and sinking so that Lady Aylmer hardly dared to hope that he would rise again, she saw Rosa suddenly turn, as it were, in her saddle and glide from it beneath the surface—her long habit caught, presumably, by something which dragged her down instantly below the surface of the boiling waters.

She never rose from them although her intrepid uncle had not seen her sink; and when, for the second time, after being buffeted back, exhausted and breathless, to the

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shore, he was about to venture on a third attempt to save her his wife laid hands upon him and tried to make him understand the hopelessness of it.

"It's no use, Aylmer—Rosa is dead now!" she gasped as she struggled with him. For she was actually obliged to use all her strength to hold him back. "If you are set upon throwing away your life for nothing, you shall not do it alone, because I shall go with you!"—a threat which, I have not the slightest doubt the fearless woman would have carried into execution.

At last he submitted to the inevitable. All that was humanly possible had been done and there was nothing more to do except to resign himself to the inscrutable decree of Heaven. Miss ——'s groom, on being asked by Lady Aylmer some time earlier, during those awful minutes, if he could swim, had answered, "No"; and she had then forbidden him to risk himself for her dear ones. And now she sent him and his mistress back to Rome for a doctor for her husband who was by this time in urgent need of one. After which, their horses having run off, Lord and Lady Aylmer began to walk home alone and on foot in a state of mind more easily imagined than described, she supporting him as well as she could, for he was far spent. At Ponte Molle they met a friend on horseback, Lady Coventry, whom Lady Aylmer was at first too distraught with grief to be able to recognise;

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but who rode back into the city for a conveyance for them—into which Lady Aylmer helped her husband, and then lay on him to keep a little warmth in him, he being chilled to the bone.

Of poor, lovely Rosa, it seemed that they were destined never more to behold a trace. In spite of a large reward which was offered for the recovery of her adored remains, the greedy river held them to itself, until all hope had long been abandoned of ever recovering them.

And then, one autumn day, of the following October, an English friend and admirer of the dead girl was returning to Rome for the winter from some distant *villeggiatura* by way of the long road leading from Bracciano to Rome. This man was Sir Charles Mills, for whom the Ponte Milvio which he had to cross to enter the city was unforgettably associated with the tragedy of the preceding spring. So strong, indeed, upon him was the recollection of it, that he felt compelled to leave his carriage to wait for him at Ponte Milvio, and to walk along the river bank to where Rosa Bathurst had perished so miserably.

It was towards the close of the afternoon and the approach of sunset was beginning to dye the clouds behind Monte Mario as he strolled on, lost in thought, towards the fatal spot. And then, all at once, he lifted his eyes



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and glanced across the Tiber to where a couple of peasants were passing along on the opposite side of it. Suddenly he saw them stop and begin to pull at something on the beach with their hands—a piece of blue cloth, the sight of which sent a thrill of reawakened anguish through him. For something told him what it was that had attracted their attention.

Calling to them to desist until he could get to them, he tore back to Ponte Molle, recrossed the river and sped along it until he had reached the place where the men were waiting for him.

“Quick! Get spades,” he told them; for only the edge of what he remembered as Rosa Bathurst’s riding-habit was above the ground—“the rest” lying buried deep in the sandy soil. And they made haste to do as he bade them; and soon they had removed the sand, and then Mills saw lying beneath his eyes the dead girl just as she had been in life—exquisitely sleeping, with her eyes closed and only a tiny bruise on her forehead. Her long blue habit was not in the least disarranged, any more than was the little riding-bonnet which she was still wearing, and which was tied upon her head by a light veil passing under the chin.

Thus Rosa Bathurst was given back at last to those who had delighted in her young loveliness; and here by the Tiber, and at the place where she had died, she was buried, whilst a pathetic memorial was raised to

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her by her mother hard by the selfsame spot where her mare's panic had been the cause of her untimely end.

But if Rosa Bathurst's death was harrowing beyond description, the circumstances of that of her father stand recorded as one of the darkest secrets of all time.

In the year 1808, Benjamin Bathurst was sent by his cousin, Earl Bathurst, the then Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, upon a secret mission to the Austrian Government with the object of persuading it to declare war against Napoleon simultaneously with the despatch of the English expedition against him in Portugal. In this, Bathurst succeeded completely; with the result of the battle of Wagram and the triumphal entry into Vienna of the French. There ensued the armistice of Znaym, during which Bathurst remained with the Emperor Francis and his Court at Komorn in Hungary whither they had retired. Here, together with Metternich, Bathurst did all in his power to induce the Emperor to persevere in the war against Napoleon; but in vain, and, on the definite conclusion of peace with the treaty of Schönbrunn in October, 1809, Bathurst asked for his passports back to England.

Already, a short while earlier, he had written home to his wife expressing the most lively fears for his safety by reason of Napoleon's animosity against him; and now,

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declaring himself to be in danger of his life from the great man's resentment (for his part in stirring up the Austrians to war) he hesitated whether to go home by Trieste and Malta or by the shorter route across Germany to Hamburg. Finally, he decided on the latter, and set off from Vienna on November the twentieth—not under his own name, but in that of Koch, and in the character of a travelling merchant. With him went his secretary, Krause, under the name of Fischer, and his valet. From Austria they journeyed up into Prussian territory and then turned west towards Brandenburg, keeping the river Elbe between them and the district under French administration which lay to the south of it.

On November 25, at midday, they reached the little town of Perleberg about twenty miles from the Elbe and about twice that distance from Parchim in Mecklenburg. Proceeding through the town, they stopped at the post-house which was at the other end of it, by the gate through which the road led on to Parchim. The post-house was occupied by a family called Schmidt, and here the travellers stayed to change horses and to partake of a slight meal. Finding the house uncomfortable, however, and the cooking atrocious, Bathurst afterwards removed himself with his companions to an inn, the "Swan," a little distance further back in the street. Having established himself there, he decided to postpone his departure

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until nightfall, in the belief that it would be safer for him to travel then than during the day when the agents of Napoleon might be expected to be overrunning the country. Also, his fears for his safety becoming intolerable, he left the "Swan" on foot and went to seek out the Prussian commandant of the town, a Captain Klitzing, to ask that sentries might be set before the inn to protect him against being murdered or kidnapped.

It is indeed strange to think of any man's being so terrified by what, at first sight, must appear nothing but the chimera of his own overwrought imagination. But subsequent circumstances would appear to show that Bathurst had something more than a premonition of what was lying in wait for him. For, many days afterwards, a scrappy pencil-note of his was delivered to his wife in England; in which, after declaring his belief that they would never meet again, and begging Mrs. Bathurst not to take a second husband after his death, he expressed the firmest conviction that his murder would lie at the door of a certain Comte d'Entraigues—of whom more anon. The letter was only the merest fragment, unfinished and never posted.

On arriving at Captain Klitzing's lodgings, he found him with some friends. The Captain was ill; but even so, he was struck with compassion for the condition of his visitor who was trembling all over and extremely agitated. Klitzing, thinking it was from the cold, went

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to his housekeeper for something with which to revive him.

“Have you got any boiling water?” he asked. “A cup of tea then—quick! I have a man here who is frozen, I think—his teeth are chattering so that he can scarcely speak!”

When the tea was brought, though, Bathurst was unable to hold it steadily, so that he spilt a quantity of it over his handsome overcoat—a long coat of sables lined with violet velvet, and by which Klitzing and his friends were particularly impressed as it seemed to speak of unusual wealth. Moreover, the rest of this Herr Koch’s costume—a cap of sable to match the coat, a grey coat and trousers of superfine cut and material, and a large and valuable jewel in his cravat—bespoke, to their simple Prussian minds, a person of considerable importance. They at once decided that he must be “somebody” in disguise—indeed, they invested him with a rank and an official standing to which he had no pretension. And, albeit Captain Klitzing could not help laughing heartily at his fears of being made away with by French marauders, nevertheless he did as he was requested, and gave word for a couple of cuirassiers to be told off for sentry duty at the “Swan.” Thereupon Bathurst returned there, and went to his own room to await the time for resuming his journey; the hour of this he now further postponed until nine o’clock at night.



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In the meantime he appears to have busied himself with writing a number of letters, all of which he tore up again—as if with the intention of setting down his suspicions of a plot against him for the subsequent guidance of his family and of the police. But as the fragments were later thrown away, nothing of what was in his thoughts in those hours has come down to us with the exception of the note to his wife.

At nine o'clock, having supped and having dismissed the sentries with a gratification for their trouble, he came out from the inn into the narrow street where the post-chaise was in readiness for him. His valise was being brought out to be put in place on top of the carriage; his secretary, "Fischer," *alias* Krause, was conversing with the landlord in the doorway of the house itself; whilst his valet was standing by the open door of the chaise, to which the postillion and the ostler had just finished harnessing the horses. The chaise lamps were not yet lit, and the only light in the street, besides that coming from the inn, was supplied by an oil lantern hung upon a rope high across the road. Everybody present was standing either on the steps of the inn or between the inn and the carriage; and the night was an intensely dark one, without either moon or stars.

Suddenly Mr. Bathurst stepped round, out of the small arena of light, to the other side of the horses as if to satisfy himself of something in the harness—and, from

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that instant, he was never seen again. Not a sound was there of any kind; he merely stepped into the darkness and never came back from it, disappearing in it as completely as if it had swallowed him up. Nor did the horses so much as move or turn their heads, as they must have done if there had been a struggle beside them or if a blow had been delivered—as some afterwards believed to have been the case—upon the head of Bathurst by some lurking foe. For, as any one who knows anything about them will admit, it takes very little of that kind to startle a horse, especially at night. But they never even stirred; so that the rest of the men continued to wait for the principal personage present to make his reappearance.

Five minutes—ten—a quarter of an hour went by; and still no sign of “Herr Koch.” One after another, the bystanders set to looking for him; they sought him in his room, thinking he might have returned indoors by a side entrance; in the garden at the back; up and down the street, and as far as the town gate, the “Parchim Thor” at the end of it. But there was nothing to be seen of him. His secretary, knowing Bathurst’s fears, even ran round to Captain Klitzing’s lodgings in the supposition of his having gone there to ask, perchance, for an escort. Again, however, no; Klitzing had neither seen nor heard anything more of him.

And so the alarm became general.

Captain Klitzing, on learning of “Herr Koch’s” disap-

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pearance, took the matter seriously in the recollection of "Koch's" own terrors lest he should fall a victim to some French freebooting gang. Returning at once with the secretary, he placed him, together with the valet, under arrest, and sent them off in charge of some of his soldiers, to another inn, the "Golden Crown." This done, he organised a regular search, ransacking the "Swan" and its neighbouring grounds, as well as the swampy meadows and the woods of the vicinity, and causing the little river, the Stepnitz, by which it stood, to be thoroughly dragged. But all without result. At the same time he took possession of "Herr Koch's" effects and found, with the help of the secretary summoned for the purpose, that they were intact with the solitary exception of the velvet-lined, sable overcoat.

Upon this point of the overcoat it seems to me that much depends. In reply to Klitzing's questions, the secretary told him that his own coat was missing as well, and that he thought both the coats must have been left at the post-house that morning. Thereupon, Klitzing went with him to the posting-house and, in searching for the missing garments, discovered one of the coats in the possession of the postmaster Schmidt's son, a boy called August, to whom his mother confessed she had given it. Of the other, though, she denied all knowledge; until, eventually, it was unearthed from below a pile of wood covered with sacking in the cellar. After this Frau

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Schmidt and her son were also arrested. But when they were tried a few weeks later, on the charge of being privy to the disappearance of "Herr Koch"—or rather Bathurst, as he was by then known to have been—young Schmidt was discharged for want of evidence, and his mother was only given a nominal sentence of eight weeks' imprisonment for stealing and false swearing. Which, considering that Bathurst had been seen wearing his coat by Klitzing himself at their interview that afternoon, and that he had not been back since then to the post-house, but had remained indoors in fear of his life until the moment of his issuing to inspect the horses, is, to say the least of it, rather remarkable as a judicial decision!

A few days later, two poor women who were gathering sticks in a wood near Perleberg, on the road to a village called Quitzow, came across a pair of trousers turned inside out and laid upon the grass close to a path leading through the wood. On examining the trousers and turning them with the right side in, they found them to be caked with earth, as if the man to whom they had belonged had been dragged through the mud. Also, they were wet through and were perforated with a couple of bullet-holes. But there was no stain of any blood on them; so the women—who, at first, had supposed them to have been thrown away by a tramp—could only conclude that they had not been in wearing when the shots were

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fired. In the pockets there was nothing except a scrap of paper half-covered with writing in pencil; that same note of Bathurst's to his wife to which reference has already been made and in which he begged her not to marry again after he should be dead—whilst accusing a certain Count d'Entraigues, beforehand, of being the cause of his murder. With this d'Entraigues he must have been familiar in London where the man was supposed to be working as a spy of the British Foreign Office against the French agents in England (whose name was known to be legion); and it would seem more than likely that d'Entraigues was actually the prime mover in his assassination by treacherously supplying the French Government with information as to Bathurst's movements and his secret mission to the Emperor Francis. And when, as will be seen, English suspicion began to fall upon d'Entraigues, he sought to turn it from him and, so to speak, "save his face" by betraying his French employers; with the result that he himself, together with his wife and confidant, was silenced forever in Fouché's best manner.

From the day of the finding of the trousers to this, no other definite trace of Bathurst has ever been found. And this notwithstanding that great rewards—two of a thousand pounds each—together with the promise of a free pardon to any informant personally implicated in



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the crime, were offered by the British Government and the Bathursts' themselves.

Early in the following year (1810) Mrs. Bathurst bravely took matters into her own hands.

Having sent on a friend in advance—Herr Röntgen, himself destined to come to a violent end as a traveller in Africa—Mrs. Bathurst wrote to the Emperor Napoleon, requesting a passport for herself and her brother to travel on the Continent with the object of investigating her husband's mysterious disappearance. On second thoughts, however, she resolved not to risk the reception of his refusal, but to go, instead, direct to his Ambassador in Berlin, St. Priest, who as she said herself, "was the virtual sovereign of Prussia." Accordingly, she set out, with her brother, a Mr. Call, under her maiden name, and duly reached Berlin where she lost no time in making known her request to St. Priest, explaining that she had written for passports to Napoleon.

"Oh, yes, Madame," he replied, "I shall be glad to do anything I can to help you. As a matter of fact, I have here a couple of passports for yourself and your brother which reached me only yesterday from the Emperor himself. He is very much interested in your case, and has given orders for all facilities to be afforded to you."

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“But how can His Majesty possibly have known that I was coming to Berlin?” said the astonished English-woman. “For I have told nobody of the change in my plans—excepting only my brother who is here with me!”

“Certainly it is very strange—but there it is,” replied the diplomatist with an enigmatic smile.

“As you say—there it is,” she returned. “It would appear that your French system of spying is better than ours in England, monsieur l’ambassadeur. But all the same, I am very grateful.”

Armed with Napoleon’s permission to go where she would, Mrs. Bathurst left Berlin for Perleberg. Here she saw and personally examined such witnesses as Klitzing had been able to get together. But, without result. Just as she was on the point of departing for Paris, there to beg of the Emperor himself that he would tell her if she might hope that her husband were still alive and would, one day, be restored to her, she was rejoined by her friend Röntgen with a very strange tale of a rumour which he had heard at Magdeburg.

It will be remembered that Magdeburg was then an integral part of the French territory and was governed by a French general officer, the commandant of the garrison.

What Röntgen had to tell was this: it was said that a certain well-known Saxon lady had been dancing with the Governor of Magdeburg at a ball there a short while

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previously, soon after Mr. Bathurst's disappearance. During their conversation she had chanced to refer to the subject of such universal interest, the events of the night of November the twenty-fifth at Perleberg. In answer to which the Governor had let fall the words, "Ah, yes, to be sure they are making a great fuss about this English ambassador of theirs—but what would they say if they knew that I had him safely under lock and key up there?" jerking his thumb in the direction of the castle that overlooked the town.

On hearing this, Röntgen had at once gone to the Governor and had asked him if it were true that he had made such a statement; and had received the reply that, while it was perfectly true that he had done so to the lady in question, yet the remark had been made in a mistaken belief that the prisoner in the castle was Mr. Bathurst—whereas, he had since learned that the man was an English spy of the name of Louis Fritz.

As may be supposed, Mrs. Bathurst instantly went herself to Magdeburg, and sought out the loose-tongued Governor. At first he would not see her; but at last the Emperor's sign-manual brought him to his senses. And then for two whole hours, Bathurst's wife stormed the man for the truth; entreating, threatening, calling down the Divine anger upon him for his concealment of the facts.

"Once more, Madame, I assure you that the man in my

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charge was not your husband, but a spy of Mr. Canning's, one Louis Fritz," he repeated again and again. "He was arrested by the *douaniers montés*<sup>1</sup> and it was only lately that I learned his real identity."

"Then, at least, let me see him that I may satisfy myself—"

"That I can not do, because he is no longer here. He is a married man, and has gone away with his wife. He has gone to Spain."

That was all the distracted woman could get out of him. Eventually, she left him, and went to Paris to seek out the Emperor. Him she was unable to reach, but he sent her word by Cambacérés to the effect that he pledged her his personal honour that he knew absolutely nothing of the matter saving only what he had read about it in the newspapers; but that she was at liberty to make any research she liked, and that orders had been given to open up every channel of investigation to her without any restriction whatsoever.

Finally, disheartened and worn out in spirit and body Mrs. Bathurst returned to London in November, 1810, and went to stay with her brother at his rooms in Bond Street. Here, shortly after her arrival, a card was brought up to her and, on glancing at it, she read the

<sup>1</sup> *Douaniers montés*—these men were the mounted preventive-officers in the French service, who as often as not combined the duties of police with those of customs-officers.

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name of one who was a total stranger to her—that of “The Comte d’Entraigues.”

And now she called to mind, with a shudder, the pencilled fragment found in her husband’s trousers in the Quitzow wood, the note in which he had made such perturbing allegations against a certain d’Entraigues—allegations which she had hitherto put aside as being quite possibly devoid of justification. But so soon as the Count was ushered into her presence, and they were alone, he gave her reason to change her opinion.

“I observe, Madame,” he began, “that you have not yet felt justified in wearing mourning for Mr. Bathurst. Nevertheless, it is my sad duty to disabuse your mind of any illusions that you may entertain regarding him. For he is certainly no longer alive. Of that I am in a position solemnly to assure you.”

And, on the unhappy woman’s entreating him for an explanation, he continued:

“The fact is, that Mr. Bathurst was arrested—or, rather, kidnapped—by *douaniers montés* at Perleberg, and then conveyed by them to Magdeburg.”

“But I have seen the Governor of Magdeburg, myself, and he has sworn to me that that was not the case—that the man arrested was not my husband, but a spy of Mr. Canning’s sent to Germany last year, a person of the name of Fritz, Louis Fritz—”

“I am afraid then he was deceiving you,” rejoined d’En-



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traigues, "because I happen to know the truth. I know also, without your telling me, of your journey to Saxony as well as of your going to Paris. When the Emperor told you that he was innocent of any knowledge of Mr. Bathurst's disappearance, he was speaking with perfect sincerity. Mr. Bathurst was arrested, not by any orders of Napoleon, but solely by those of Fouché who looked upon him as a dangerous person. And when the Governor of Magdeburg wrote to inform him that the arrest had been carried out and to ask for further instructions, he received a letter to say that the Emperor was not to be troubled about it, but that Mr. Bathurst was to be executed quickly and with the utmost secrecy. At the time that the Governor made that unguarded remark at the ball to his partner, he had not yet had an answer from Fouché. Afterwards, he was obliged to invent a story to account for his own indiscreet utterance. If you will inquire at the Foreign Office here in London, you will find that no spy of the name of Louis Fritz has ever been heard of. Moreover, I have written to Paris privately, to obtain positive evidence, which I will place before you when it arrives in a few days, of the absolute truth of what I am telling you."

Having delivered himself of this astonishing statement, he took his leave of the broken-hearted widow and left her to make what best she could of it.

Soon after d'Entraigues had gone away, Röntgen came

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to see her, the same who had previously prepared the way for her in Germany; to him she related what had happened and begged him to go at once and to lay the matter before Mr. Canning in person with an entreaty that he would cause inquiries to be made with the object of confirming or disproving d'Entraigues' denial of the existence of such a person as Louis Fritz. With this request Röntgen complied instantly, and returned, later on, to say that Mr. Canning had ordered a research to be made in the Secret Service department of the Foreign Office; of which research the result was to establish the fact that no one of the name of Louis Fritz was even known there, and that certainly no such spy had ever issued from it.

Twenty-four hours later, the whole of London was agog with the news of a frightful double murder and suicide. It appeared that, as, on that next afternoon, the Count and Countess d'Entraigues had been getting into their carriage at Twickenham where they lived, for their customary daily drive, they had both been killed by one of their servants, a Frenchman who had only been in their service a few days.

The facts of this double assassination as they were made public, were of the most meagre and unsatisfactory kind.

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The Count, who was known to have taken his wife completely into his confidence in everything, was discovered to have been long engaged in a series of double-dealings with the British and French governments. Although he had for years been on the pay-roll of the English Secret Service, yet it now seemed almost certain (and his intimate knowledge of Fouché's doings would appear to substantiate this report) that he had been also drawing a regular wage from that of Napoleon for information respecting the English spy system. And one cannot doubt but that it was through d'Entraigues that Fouché had been kept apprised of Bathurst's moves and of the fact that Mrs. Bathurst and her brother had left London for Berlin by means of passports issued to them by our own Foreign Office. So that, after all, poor Bathurst's fears for his life may well have been inspired by something more than mere nervousness!

The details of d'Entraigues' end and that of his wife were, as has been said, scanty in the extreme. As Madame d'Entraigues had been about to set her foot upon the step of the carriage, the new manservant, who was holding the door of it open for her, had suddenly drawn a knife and thrust it into her heart. At the same moment, her husband, seeing her fall, from where he stood at the entrance to the house, had turned and run back into the building—presumably for a weapon—followed by the murderer, knife in hand. A few minutes later, they were

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both found lying dead on the floor of the Count's study, both of them having been shot; and beside them lay a brace of discharged pistols.

The only solution of this terrible affair which presented itself to Mrs. Bathurst, on learning of it, was that the servant must have been an agent of Fouché's; and that the latter, having determined upon ridding himself of d'Entraigues as dangerous to him, had entrusted the mission of destroying that double-dyed traitor to some desperate malefactor—as likely as not to some condemned criminal with the promise that, if he could kill the two d'Entraigues and escape from the English police, he might have his own life and a sum of money into the bargain. Of which contract, the luckless wretch after performing the first part, and then finding escape impossible, had probably made away with himself. As to this last fatal *volte-face* of d'Entraigues, one can only presume that he must have been influenced in it by a wish to divert from himself any suspicions of having been implicated in the burking of Bathurst which might have been conceived against him by his victim's widow and the English authorities in consequence of the note found in the abandoned trousers—of the contents of which he had probably been made aware through the official inquiry at Perleberg.

Many years afterwards, when a skeleton was found there in a house near the Parchim gate, hard by the

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“Swan,” Signora Pistocchi travelled up from Rome on the invitation of the Prussian Government, to see if she could identify the bones as being those of her brother. But she was able to say quite positively that they were not; this she did by the teeth and the shape of the skull as well as by the difference in the angle of the nose. So that the exact fate of Bathurst still remains shrouded in uncertainty; although, personally, I strongly suspect that there was, at any rate, an element of fact in d’Entraigues’ story of Fouché and the Governor of Magdeburg.



## Chapter Ten

### DANCERS AND MUSICIANS

**I**T is strange to mark what small things open up the widest tracks of thought and reminiscence. Some scent that strikes the nostrils recalls at once most vividly a certain scene in some long-ago, familiar place, and peoples it with all the characters that one was meeting or reading about at that time. So, also, does a bar or two of an air of bygone days conjure up all the stories one ever heard connected with its composer or the original performer of it.

For instance, who can ever hear even a few notes of "La Sylphide" without there floating across the vision the fairy-like form of sweet Marie Taglioni (who made that ballet her own), that most perfect exponent of the art of Terpsichore who has ever touched the boards of a stage.

Of course my recollections of her are not "first hand"; but her fame was still fresh in every one's memory when the time came for me to be enchanted by her successors, and the story of her career is so bright and inspiring that I may be forgiven for bringing it once more to the remembrance of present-day theatre-goers.

Those who revelled in her zephyr-like movements, so

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seemingly spontaneous and inspired by the sheer love of her art, would hardly believe how many years of really severe training had to be gone through before this bright Italian star shone and twinkled on the stage of almost every European capital. At a very early age little Marie announced her intention of becoming a dancer! Her father, Filippo Taglioni, was ballet-master at the Court Opera-house at Stockholm, and it was in that city that Marie was born on St. George's Day, 1804. Her mother was a daughter of the famous tenor and tragedian, Karsten, whose voice gave so much pleasure to Gustavus III, who, when he was dying, sent for the singer and begged him to soothe the last hours with some of the sweet songs that he loved.

Marie Taglioni's character showed traces of both her Italian and Swedish blood. The purity and simplicity of the North combined with all the artistic fire and enthusiasm of the South. She began her training at the age of eight, and her father, though a most loving and kind parent, was a very strict master, and there were many hours of exercises that made the little limbs ache and almost discouraged the small heart, but the child loved the movements and the music and was strongly determined to become the greatest dancer in the world and so she worked on, knowing that perfect results could only be obtained by strictest work and exercise. Her education was not neglected for the sake of her art, however, and

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for some years her father sent her to school in France.

At length the reward of all her labours gleamed ahead of the young girl and her *début* was fixed for June 10, 1822, at Vienna.

For this great event her father composed a special ballet, called "The Reception of a Nymph at the Court of Terpsichore." As the eighteen-year-old *ballerina* tripped on to the stage in the glare of the footlights she was seized with a momentary panic and completely forgot the first steps with which she was to begin her dance. Mercifully, however, she was inspired with some other interpretation of the music and the brilliant steps she improvised on the spur of the moment carried the *débutante* straight away into the heart of her audience.

From that night Marie Taglioni's success was assured. "She became the heroine of the theatre. Novelists put her in their stories. Poets wrote verses on her"—and it is even said that ladies copied her ideas in dress. There is a story which illustrates the length to which this flattering imitation was carried. On one occasion, in her hurry, the famous dancer had turned up the brim of her hat at some absurd angle, and the ladies of the audience at once determined that this was *the* smartest style and afterwards the leaders of fashion in Vienna appeared with their hats endeavouring to follow the same strange and ridiculous line!

The fame of such an exceptional dancer soon spread

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from one end of Europe to the other, and very shortly offers of engagements poured in from every capital and leading town. At all these places Mlle. Taglioni met with a wonderful reception, and hospitality of the most friendly kind was extended to her by the great ladies of every court, who were completely captivated by her perfect simplicity and refinement of manner.

It was on one of these tours—either at Moscow or St. Petersburg—that an incident occurred which serves to give testimony to the purity of this renowned *ballerina's* style of dancing. One night, at the Opera-house, the Emperor and Empress were watching the ballet from the royal box, when one of their friends, who had been sitting in the stalls, came up and told the monarch that it was impossible to see the *première danseuse's* knee. This the Emperor could scarcely believe, so, to judge for himself he accompanied his friend to the stalls from where he watched the performance for some minutes, and, on re-joining the Empress in her box he declared, "It is perfectly true. One absolutely cannot see her knee!" And thus people gradually became aware of the fact that Marie Taglioni never wore a skirt that permitted of her knee being seen.

She had splendid high ideals for her art; ideals which were strengthened by her father's teaching and advice throughout her training and career. As he frequently said to her, "*Il faut que les femmes et les jeunes filles*

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*puissent te voir danser sans rougir; que ta danse soit pleine d'austerité, de délicatesse et de goût."* And this recalls, also, a reprimand that Marie administered to one of her admirers at Milan. The young man requested her to shorten her skirt "just a very little"—to which she replied haughtily, "Signore, I do not dance for men; I dance for wives and daughters."

It was not until July 23, 1827, that Paris secured its longed-for view of this inimitable dancer. Her first appearance there was at the Opera house in "The Sicilian" and immediately the press and the *beau monde* of the gay city went wild over her. One who was privileged to see her on that occasion writes: "She looks not more than fifteen. Her figure is small but rounded to the very last degree of perfection. Her face is strangely interesting, not quite beautiful, but of a half-feeling, half-retiring, sweetness"—and again, referring to her wonderful movements and steps: "All is done with such a childish unconsciousness of admiration that the delight with which she fills you is unmingled."

Small wonder then, that after the furore that she occasioned by each appearance at the continental capitals, London should be most eager for a glimpse of this Terpsichorean marvel, and at last she was persuaded to cross the Channel. During the three-weeks' performances which she gave at the King's Theatre in 1830, the house was crowded from stalls to gallery. From that time on-



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ward Mlle. Taglioni resided principally in Paris, coming to London at intervals for short seasons. It was in Paris that she met Count Gilbert de Voisins to whom she became betrothed; and they were married in 1845, her final appearance in London being in the early part of that year. To the great joy, however, of her multitudinous friends and admirers, the adored dancer did not leave the stage immediately after her marriage; but, after two years of happy married life she decided to retire. and gave her farewell performance in Paris in 1847.

The Countess had now another rôle to play, that of devoted mother to her beloved boy and girl; and in this character she excelled as she had done in those of her stage impersonations. Her daughter, Marguërite, was married in 1866 to Prince Windischgraetz, and their child, Countess Marie, named after her renowned grandmother, subsequently became Princess Troubetzkoi. At the time of the death of Count Gilbert de Voisins, which occurred in 1868, the family were living at Figueira, in Spain, where the Count held the post of Vice-Consul. After this sad event the widow returned to Paris, where she remained during the siege of 1870, assisting to the utmost of her power in the work of nursing and tending the sick and wounded. Her son, young Count Gilbert, was with the French army from the beginning of the war, and his mother was distracted at being unable to obtain any news of him. At length a report reached her that he had been

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killed, but mercifully this was soon contradicted and it was found that he was only wounded. From that moment, of course, the Countess' one wish was to be at his side, and at the earliest possible opportunity she left Paris and went in search of him. At first the result of her inquiries led her in the wrong direction, and on reaching a certain military hospital she discovered that the wounded officer to whom she had been directed was not her son but some one else of his name. Nothing daunted, she journeyed on, overcoming every obstacle (and these were by no means insignificant for travellers in France during 1870), though no one seemed able to give her any definite news of her son's whereabouts. At last, after many weary and anxious days the devoted mother found him in an old farmhouse where she remained to nurse him until his recovery was complete.

Very soon after the war Countess de Voisins made her home in Venice. It is described as "a gem-like palace," but, alas, her ample fortune was greatly diminished, like that of so many other people, as the result of the depreciation of property during the war; and, a few years later, the charming old lady found her means so limited that she decided to come to London and give lessons in the art in which she had no equal. It was pointed out to her that a grateful public would gladly subscribe to a "testimonial" for her in her straitened circumstances, but the proud old lady preferred to accept no assistance of that sort, and so

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we find her, at the age of seventy, worshipped by her pupils in her little *académie* in London.

There is a description of a portrait of the Countess about this time which brings her very clearly before our eyes: "The ample silver hair is dressed in quite an old-fashioned style; parted in the centre, brushed smoothly down on either side, twisted coronet-fashion over the back of the head, and arranged in curls on the temples. The high, broad forehead is furrowed, but not too deeply, with wrinkles. . . . The eyebrows are arched and well-defined, the eyes small and bright; the mouth rather large, and, with the chin, almost masculine in character; but as full of gentleness as of strength. Around the throat, the muscles of which are very strongly developed, is a fine white ruffle fastened by a brooch with a pendant. She wears a plain black silk dress with a lace mantle covering the shoulders. The expression is thoroughly Italian and the whole picture is that of an intelligent and very kindly old lady, to whom, if one had any trouble to tell, one would go in the confident hope of finding a shrewd and sympathetic counsellor."

One of the greatest charms of Marie Taglioni's dancing was that it appeared always to be spontaneous—just the joyous expression of what the music meant to her; and she confessed that, on many occasions when she did not feel that the steps she had practised would capture her audience, she used to improvise a rendering of her own—the

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outcome of sheer joy in her art, which instantly communicated itself to the onlookers.

In the twilight of her days some one asked the old lady if she would like to live her life over again. "Yes, to dance," came the prompt reply, "for nothing else but that; but I would live again to dance!"

During these years when she was giving dancing lessons in London, her children were always trying to persuade her to make her home with one of them, but the brave Countess preferred to maintain her independence until the very last few years of her life. At length, however, she gave way to her son's appeal and returned to France, taking up her residence with him at Marseilles. Here, surrounded by her adoring family, her noble life drew to its close, and the end came on April 24, 1884. Peace to her bright and courageous spirit!

It was during the reign of the last Grand Duke of Tuscany that there occurred in connection with the theatre at Florence, one of the most strangely interesting little human dramas of which I have ever heard.

It is the story of a young girl who captivated the Florentines for a brief season by her incomparable beauty and talent as a dancer—and then, all at once, just as the world of European theatre-goers was at its keenest to see the



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successor of Vestris and Taglioni, she disappeared from the stage and was never seen on it again.

Let us call her Teresinella Bandiera.

Some sixty years ago, there was living in Florence a young man of the name of Rossani, who was pursuing a course of studies in jurisprudence at the university there. Unlike the greater number of his fellow students, Rossani was not given to sociability or to amusing himself in his spare moments at the cafés and places of entertainment; he neither made friendships nor was ever known to have lost his heart to any woman, however charming and attractive—as was the custom of his more frivolous companions. His work was, apparently, all in all to the studious Rossani whom no charge of misanthropy could induce to change his way of life against a more light-hearted one. Melancholy, solitary and diligent, he went his lonely road without permitting himself the slightest deviation from it in spite of the chaff and rallying of his comrades—until one fateful evening about the time of the Crimean War when he suffered himself to be persuaded, much against his will, to form one of a party to the theatre. For such had been the pressure put upon him by the other students, and so impressed had he been by their extravagant enthusiasm for an unknown dancer, that he had no longer found it possible to resist their entreaties that he would accompany them to see her—“Just for this once,” as they put it to him—“in order that you may really



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know what it is to live. After that, when you have seen our Teresinella, you may go back to your musty law-books if you like. But we do not believe that you will. At any rate, it will do you good to broaden your mind a little by seeing her dance, Rossani nostro!"

And so, accepting their invitation as a challenge to him, Rossani consented and went.

From that hour he was a changed man. So soon as the curtain rose upon the scene of the ballet, a storm of applause greeted the appearance of the *première danseuse*, a radiant blushing slip of a girl who bowed again and again with evident impatience to begin her dancing, in response to the tumult of acclamations that were showered upon her. One can picture the scene; the glowing stage and twilight body of the theatre with its avidly enthusiastic occupants of whom even those in the box reserved for the Grand Duke—a typical "John Bull" of a man to look at in spite of his snowy Austrian tunic and the flambant Austrian insignia of the Golden Fleece that hung below his military stock—were clapping their hands and cheering like school-children at a fair; and then the gradual hush through which the first bars of the music began to rise up into the murky dome overhead.

And, as the amazing perfection of the principal dancer's loveliness became borne in upon Rossani's awakening appreciation of things beautiful, some new and hitherto hid-

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den emotions stirred to life in him, making him draw in his breath sharply and shade his eyes an instant with his hand, as though they were dazzled by something. Saving for that one movement, he did not stir or speak at all during the whole time that Teresinella was on the stage; and when the ballet was over, and she had withdrawn after refusing the last of countless recalls, Rossani went out silently from the theatre into the night, his soul stirred to its very depths. To his fellow students, on their inquiring of him how he had enjoyed the dancing of Teresinella, he vouchsafed scarcely more than a few words to the effect that, "Yes, he had liked it—it had been very interesting," and so forth. And that was all.

But, thenceforth, his leisure time was devoted to making inquiries regarding the girl whose wondrous comeliness had changed his whole interior life, imparting to it a new warmth and lustre. Even now, however, he did not attempt to make her acquaintance; but, night after night he might be seen sitting in his seat in the theatre, devouring every movement with his eager eyes which seemed blind to every other object, until it was patent to all that his entire being was bound up with hers.

It was little enough that he had been able to learn about her; but that little sufficed to inflame him with compassion and indignation. Barely sixteen years of age, Teresinella was the daughter of an unprincipled and heartless

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mother whose greed for gain had driven the girl upon the boards with the iniquitous intention of selling her beauty to the highest bidder—from which hideous fate Rossani was determined, come what might, to deliver her at all costs. How he was to do this, he was not quite sure, for in the effecting of his purpose he would have to reckon not only with the mercenary mother's guarding of her from all influences for good, but, also, with the delight of Teresinella herself in her own triumphs as a dancer and her own powers of subjugating her audience. For he could see that her success was rapidly becoming the dominating factor in the girl's life, so that she was growing to depend upon the stimulant of it, much as a drunkard craves for that of liquor; and from this peril Rossani was resolved to save her.

Finally, after much thinking, he saw the only way of effecting his purpose, and made up his mind to follow it.

The theatrical season was drawing to a close with which Teresinella's stay in Florence would also come to an end, and she would go elsewhere—to London or Paris or Vienna—to increase her fame before a larger and wealthier public. Now or never was the time for Rossani, her true lover, to carry out his purpose of rescuing his beloved from the perils that awaited her.

Such, indeed, had been her conquest of Florence that it

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was arranged that the city should show its recognition of her merits by according her a "benefit" night at the State Theatre itself; an event at which, needless to say, every university student who could afford it (and many, doubtless who could not) was bent upon assisting. According to the Italian custom, moreover, of those days, they proposed to present Teresinella with some complimentary verses in honour of the occasion; of which verses copies were to be distributed among the audience during the ballet.

Here was the opportunity for which Rossani had been waiting.

"I will see to it; you may safely leave it all to me," he assured his friends—by now he had become human enough to have friendships with others of the students—and forthwith proceeded to busy himself with the composition of the sonnet and the arrangements for printing it. To no one, though, would he confide the secret of his verses which, as he said, was to be a little surprise for them all—and so they let him do as he wished, rather enjoying the little mystification than otherwise.

Eventually, the benefit night arrived, and with it a more complete triumph than any she had yet scored, for Teresinella. Panting ever so slightly with her exertions she confronted the semi-delirious audience, overwhelmed with applause and with presents of flowers and jewellery.



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And, all the while that she was dancing her last dance in Florence, Rossani, was making the round of the theatre, bearing a huge pile of printed leaflets which he distributed to every one in turn, going from box to box and through all the seats.

As he went, and the public bent in curiosity over the verses which he had left with them, there arose from all parts of the house a loud whisper of excitement and astonishment.

And then, at last, a special copy of Rossani's verses, luxuriously printed and bound in satin, was handed up by him to the radiant girl herself. As she took them from him, their eyes met, and Teresinella lowered her own to the leaflet that she had received from him, and there fell a hush upon all those present.

Suddenly, as she perused the verses that Rossani had put into her hand, all the flush of happiness in the girl's face went out of it, leaving her deathly white.

"I will never dance again!" she cried. "Never—never!"—with which she tore the leaflet across and threw the pieces to the ground.

And she kept her word. Nothing could ever again induce her to enter a theatre, or to dance so much as a single step. Nor was it long before those she had captivated by her dancing learned that she had retired from the world into a life of seclusion there to turn her mind to higher things.



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As to the verses—or, rather, the verse—which changed her life, here it is for the benefit of the reader:

“Dimmi che cosa è Re—  
Di reo due terzi egli è.  
Anzi, per dirti il vero,  
La differenza è Zero!”<sup>1</sup>

But of Rossani's life after that night when he succeeded in rescuing Teresinella Bandiera from the pitfalls which her own talent and her mother's cupidity were possibly preparing for her, I know nothing. Whatever it may have been, though, I cannot think that he had lived quite in vain.

From dancers and their charms one's mind naturally travels to music and composers, in which our dear Italy is, and has been, so extraordinarily rich.

There are many biographies published of great musicians, but there is frequently some human note of romance and tragedy in their lives that does not penetrate into those

<sup>1</sup> A play on the words “Re,” a King, and “Reo,” a Criminal. Here is the literal translation:

Tell me, what is King? (Re)  
Two-thirds a criminal. (Reo)  
Indeed, to say the truth,  
The difference is a nought!

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printed volumes—I was thinking of the love-story of Pergolese and Maria Spinelli, for instance, which is so closely connected with Naples and its environs.

This Donna Maria was of the Naples branch of the old Spinelli family, which dates back to 1094, and to which have belonged numerous titles and lands—"ninety-nine Baronies, eight Countships, nine Marquisates, eight Duchies and the Principalities of Cariati, Oliveto, Palma, etc., etc."—according to the record in the *Dizionario Storico-Blasonico delle Famiglie Nobili e Notabili Italiane*.

About the year 1732, Maria Spinelli, daughter of Prince Cariati, lived with her three brothers in the family palace at Naples, and it was there that she and the composer met, and fell deeply in love with each other. He was quite young at that time though he had already written some glorious music, sacred and operatic, which, however, was destined to be far more appreciated after his death than during his lifetime.

Giovanni Battista Pergolese was born at Jesi, in the Papal States, on January 4, 1710. At the age of sixteen he entered the *conservatorium* of the "Poveri di Gesu Cristo" at Naples, and continued his studies of the various branches of music under de Mattei, Greco, and Duranto. He played the violin, as well as devoting himself to composition, but it was the harmonical novelty of his musical writings that first attracted attention. He soon came

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under the patronage of the Duke of Maddaloni, a great nobleman of that district, and it was probably through his patron's influence that young Pergolese was commissioned by the people of Naples to write a Solemn Mass as a votive offering to their Patron Saint, St. Januarius, after the terrible earthquake of 1731. This work brought the composer into prominence and great popularity in Naples; but even so, he was made to understand plainly that he was by no means a suitable match for a daughter of the great house of Spinelli.

Though he was desperately in love with Maria he seems to have realised the gulf between them, for he writes—after rhapsodies of love and adoration—“there is an insuperable barrier to our union, the difference of lineage and fortune and the inflexible pride of your relatives.” As the sweet and lovely girl continued to bestow her thoughts and affections on the humble but brilliant artist, her three brothers came to her one day and threatened, that unless she would accept a husband of noble birth whom they had selected for her, they would promptly slay Pergolese. Donna Maria was given three days in which to make up her mind.

After that time, which was spent in an agony of striving with herself to find some way of escape from dishonouring the real love in her heart by marrying one to whom she could give no affection, she told her brothers that she would renounce all worldly joys and enter a con-

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vent; upon one condition, which was that Pergolese should conduct the Mass at which she took the veil. To this they agreed, and shortly afterwards the ceremony took place and the condition was adhered to—Pergolese, heart-broken at this final separation from his beloved, directing the music of the Mass.

A year later, in 1734, the frail little novice died, and the lover-musician once more conducted the Mass in the beautiful convent chapel, this time for Maria's funeral.

"Martyr of love," he writes of her; his heart died with her and his health began to fail rapidly, though his aunt, Cecilia Giorgi, who loved him dearly, made every effort to take care of him. Besides the tragedy of his love for Maria Spinelli, Pergolese had suffered great disappointments in the antipathetic reception accorded to his operas, and was in great poverty. It was the composer Duni, whose opera "Nerone" had met with such a signal success about that time, who told Pergolese that the latter's music was too delicate and beautiful to be appreciated by the vulgar public—and so it proved, for it was not until some years after his death that his work met with its due appreciation.

Some months after the death of Maria, Giovanni Pergolese began to show signs of grave lung trouble which developed rapidly, and in the February of 1736 he was taken to the monastery of the Cappucini at Pozzuoli. There, in spite of great weakness and suffering, he con-

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tinued to work at his famous "Stabat Mater," which remained the best known of his sacred compositions. For this glorious inspiration the musician was to be paid the sum of ten ducats—about £2—and it was a cause of much worry and anxiety to him in those last weeks, to think that he might not live to complete the work and that he would thereby defraud his patrons!

Mercifully he was spared until the last notes were written, but five days later, on March 16, he passed away. In spite of all the magnificent work which he had accomplished, we hear that all his small effects had to be sold to defray his funeral expenses which amounted to eleven ducats; and this, notwithstanding the strenuous efforts of his devoted aunt who had done so much for him through all his troubles.



## Chapter Eleven

### LOUIS XVIII AND THE SEER OF GALLARDON

**N**O affair, perhaps, created more stir in English, French, and German circles during the early years of the nineteenth century than that of Antoine Thomas Ignace Martin, the visionary of Gallardon near Chartres. For if one accepts the testimony not only of Martin himself, but of countless witnesses who knew him, as true, and the revelation of the man as being those of a sane and honest being—and there is no reason to do otherwise—one is compelled to admit that there has been nothing like the “*affaire Martin*” since the days of Joan of Arc.

Born in 1783 in the village of Gallardon, Martin—who appears by a miracle to have escaped military service—was nearly thirty-three in 1816, in which year, on the fifteenth of January, the first of his many visions took place. He had then been married some time and was the father of several children, one of whom, Doctor Martin, who published an account of some of his father’s relations with the Government of Charles X, was still living so recently as 1894. In every respect the most normal of men, Antoine Martin was not even open to the honourable charge of being a particularly zealous Catholic,

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seeing that, according to his parish priest, he was in the habit of only frequenting the Sacraments once a year; so that he cannot be accused by rationalists of being what the French would call "exalted!" For the rest, he was sincerely devout in his loyalty to the Church, as well as being a shrewd farmer and a good neighbour; if he erred in any way it was on the side of rough common sense rather than of any tendency to mysticism.

On the fifteenth of January, then, in the year 1816, he was working busily in his fields as usual about half-past two in the afternoon; when, being bent over his spade, he was suddenly conscious that somebody was watching him and speaking to him, although he could not distinguish the actual words of what was being said. Presently, however, he looked up; and, there, only a few feet away, he saw standing a small man, very pale and gentle-looking, wearing a brown coat buttoned in the fashion of those days from the chin nearly to the feet, together with a round hat. Without being in the least uncomfortable at sight of the stranger whom he took to be there for the purpose of asking the road to some place or other, Martin inquired, leaning on his spade:

"Can I do anything for you, sir?"

"Yes," was the reply, "you can. I am sent to you by God with a message. You are to go to the King<sup>1</sup> in

<sup>1</sup>Louis XVIII, uncle of the Dauphin Louis XVII, whose escape from the Temple in 1795 is now so clearly an established fact.

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Paris and to repeat to him what I am going to tell you." And then, without paying any attention to Martin's astonishment at these words, the stranger continued, speaking in a low, but extremely clear, voice that was at once penetrating and yet full of an indescribable benignity: "You are to tell him that not only he himself but the princes of the royal family are in great danger through bad people who are conspiring to overthrow all law and order in France. They have already done much harm by the secret circulation of pamphlets in several departments. The strictest police supervision is necessary, especially in Paris in order to thwart their evil designs. The King is also to see to it that Sunday be kept holy throughout the kingdom and that all building shall cease upon that day. Moreover, he is to give orders that public prayers be offered up in every department for the conversion of the nation to a better way of life. And you are to threaten him with the Divine wrath and the direst calamities upon himself and the French people unless he complies with these commands. Others, also, I have for him, but they will be made known to you in due time."

Martin, though, who still imagined his visitant to be some earthly being, retorted irritably—for he was anxious to be getting on with his work:

"But why do you tell me these things, sir? How can I go to the King with my hands covered with farmyard filth? Since you appear to be acquainted with His Maj-

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esty, why do you not go to him and say what you have to say yourself?"

To which the stranger answered:

"It is not I but you who must go to him and tell him. It is for me to command, and for you to obey."

So saying, to Martin's consternation, he began gradually to disappear from before him; which he did by shrinking, as it were, into himself, and then all at once, he was gone, like a flame blown out by the wind; and Martin was alone once more, trembling in every limb as of a palsy.

As soon as he had recovered sufficiently to be able to move his limbs, Martin, although he could not stir from the spot, to which it seemed to him that he was rooted, yet contrived to resume his work, remaining there until it was finished. But so tremendous was his new found power of toil that this particular piece of digging which he had expected to occupy him at least two hours and a half, was finished in a little over half that time. After which, he found himself strong enough, at last, to leave the place and to look for his brother to whom he related his extraordinary experience. The upshot of it was that they went together to the Curé and laid the matter before him.

At first the good priest was inclined to treat it as an hallucination and advised Martin to think no more of it, but to eat and sleep as well as he could in order to re-

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store his nerves and mind to their proper condition. This advice Martin accepted, protesting at the same time that there was nothing whatsoever amiss with his health and that he was as sure of the reality of what he had seen and heard as he was of the presence and voice of the Curé himself. But it was not long before the latter was as convinced of the truth as was his parishioner.

During the next few days Martin saw the man in the long coat several times; and upon each of these occasions he received a reprimand for not having already left Gallardon for Paris, there to deliver himself of the message with which he had been entrusted for the King. On January 21, the anniversary of the death of Louis XVI, which fell on a Sunday, as he was stepping into his pew in church, he became aware of the presence of the mysterious stranger in the aisle beside him. Closing the pew, that was of the old-fashioned kind with a low door to it, Martin withdrew into the further corner of it and applied himself as well as he could to following the service which was that of Benediction. None the less, in spite of his efforts not to allow his attention to be distracted from what was in progress within the chancel in front of him, he could not help observing the conduct of "The Angel"—as he was by now beginning to call his unknown visitant. On entering the building he had seen him dip a finger, like the rest of the congregation, in the holy-water basin, and cross himself in the ordinary manner; and,



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now, the honest peasant was additionally impressed by the extreme reverence of "The Angel's" attitude throughout the service. When it was over, though, Martin became seized once more with panic, and made his way home as quickly as his legs would carry him in the intention of shutting out the mysterious person from the house. But in this he failed completely; for the other was there as soon as he, and proceeded to take him to task more severely than ever for his delay in seeking out the Sovereign.

And still Martin hung back from the task thus imposed upon him; until, eventually, a couple of days later, he went back to the Curé and again consulted with him; and, when the latter had said Mass for light upon the matter, it was decided that Martin should go to the Bishop of the diocese, that of Versailles, and ask for his advice.

Unlike the Curé, the Bishop took the case seriously at once, and, after hearing Martin's account of his visions, told him to question the apparition the next time it appeared to him, to ask its name and, so to speak, its credentials; and to report carefully everything it should tell him to the Curé.

Shortly after his return from Versailles to Gallardon, Martin, on being visited again by the stranger, did as the prelate had bidden him, and found courage to address the unknown.

"But why," he asked, "do you come to me, a poor and

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ignorant peasant who knows nothing of the ways of courts? Why do you not go, instead, to some notability who could so much more easily do what you require?"

"As to that," was the reply, "pride must be checked, and this thing can be done only by you who are humble and lowly. For pride comes from there," pointing down to the ground, "but humility is of God. For yourself, I am to tell you that you are to continue in humility; also, you are to attend all the church services regularly and to avoid bad company. I was present with you when you went to the Bishop, the other day, and he told you to ask me my name. But that is not necessary for you to know, however, in going to Versailles; but you must do as I have ordered you and go to the King."

Even now, though, the seer yet delayed to carry out his instructions to the end; and in the course of the next four weeks, they were repeatedly enjoined upon him in terms of ever increasing severity. And, at this juncture, there enters a new and most important point into their communications—that of the right of Louis XVIII to occupy the French throne. At one of the appearances of the stranger to Martin, the former spoke to him as follows in regard to the condition of affairs in France:

"The Usurper's return, last year," said he, "was not due to human agency, but was ordained as a chastisement. The Usurper did not return through man's will, but for the purpose of chastising France. All the royal family

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had offered up prayers that they might come into *legitimate* possession of their own; but so soon as they had come back they forgot their prayers. France is in a kind of delirium and must be saved from herself. Unless justice is done, and the throne restored to him to whom it belongs by right, worse will yet follow for the King together with the royal family and the whole country!"

All these sayings of his mysterious visitor Martin—who understood nothing of their meaning—reported faithfully to the Curé, by whom they were sent on to the Bishop of Versailles; and the latter was so much struck by them that he thought it his duty to place the Prefect of the Department, the Comte de Breteuil, in possession of them and to suggest the advisability of Martin's being sent to Paris to see the Prefect of Police. The Bishop's idea seems to have been that "The Angel's" words were indeed direct from Heaven, and that there was really no choice for him but to act upon them. In this view of the case, moreover, Breteuil would have appeared to have agreed with him; for, after interviewing Martin, the Prefect sent him on to the head of the police in Paris in the charge of a lieutenant of gendarmerie, one André.

The pair, Martin and his escort, left Versailles on March 6, 1816, reaching the capital the same night; and, the next morning, André brought his companion with him to the police headquarters for examination by the Minister.

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The French Minister of Police in 1816 was that Decazes whose name was destined to be linked forever with that of his master, Louis XVIII, and whom some—the majority—have judged worthy of every obloquy; albeit there have also been found others to pronounce him a greatly wronged man. The truth is probably neither altogether the one nor the other, for appearances are notoriously deceptive, and human beings have been always prone to basing their judgment of public persons more or less upon their own prejudices. But to continue with our story:

Decazes happening to be occupied with other things at first, the examination of Martin was deputed by him to one of his subordinates who did his utmost to shake the seer's belief in the reality of his own visions. But without success; until the Minister found time to summon Martin to his presence and to question him personally.

"What is it that you want?" he asked. "To see the King? But, my good man, let me tell you that that is not so easy as it sounds. Even I, myself, can not obtain access to His Majesty without a written permission."

To which Martin answered that, all the same, he must do as "The Angel" had commanded him, as he could know no peace until he should have done so.

"Pooh! I have had your 'angel,' as you call him, arrested and he is now safe in prison. What do you say to that?"

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“I say that, if you will send for him, I will tell you if it is really he or not. Because I know what I am saying, and that it is not possible for any one to lay hands upon him against his will. Ah, now, here he is—he is standing beside me at this moment.”

But Decazes only smiled and rang a bell for his secretary, of whom he inquired with a wink:

“Go and see if the man I ordered you to have arrested this morning is still in prison.”

And presently, after an absence of suitable duration, the secretary made his reappearance to report that the prisoner was still in the cell where he had been put. But Martin shook his head and insisted that it could not be so and that they must be mistaken; so that, finally, he was dismissed, and went back with André to the hotel at which they had taken up their quarters. Here, that same day, Martin came to André and said to him:

“I have seen my ‘angel’ again, Monsieur, and he has told me that it is high time the King was warned of the dangers which threaten him.”

André, however, only smiled and shrugged his shoulders. But the frequency of Martin’s visions of the man in the coat now increased, recurring daily and almost hourly, apprising him of Decazes’ intention of sending a celebrated alienist, Doctor Pinel, to see him under an assumed name and character; and of how the Government would place him for a time in the madhouse at Charenton.



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All of which soon came to pass. In the meanwhile, Martin learned for the first time the identity of his visitor. On Sunday, March 10, 1816, the vision appeared to him, saying, "The men by whom you are surrounded are hard of belief, but, in order that their hearts may be softened, it is permitted them to know my name. Tell them that I am the Archangel Raphael, the servant of God, and that I have been given power to visit France with all manner of afflictions, unless the people reform their ways and justice is done. You are to insist upon seeing the King at once, when the things which you are to say to him will be put into your mouth."

The very next day, Martin was visited by Doctor Pinel (who pretended to be a phrenologist) and transferred to Charenton. Here Decazes caused him to be kept in durance throughout the month of March; but the Minister's curiosity to know what it might be that the seer had to reveal to the monarch was such that an audience with the King was arranged for Martin on the second of April. In regard to this interview Martin stipulated that not only Louis XVIII should be present but also his brother, Monsieur, afterwards Charles X, the Duchesse d'Angoulême and the ill-fated Duc de Berry who was heir to the throne after his father, that same Monsieur. To this stipulation the King—who in his terror-stricken conscience, had the strongest of reasons for not wishing any one but himself to hear what Martin might have to im-

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part to him on behalf of the Archangel—demurred, promising, however, to tell his family later on whatever it should seem best to him to tell them of any revelation that Martin should make to him.

By which decision Monsieur and the other Royalties were deeply disappointed; since they, like the rest of the world of Paris, were keenly interested in the Seer of Gallardon and his mysterious message for the King.

As Martin said himself in subsequently describing his interview, he had at first not the slightest idea of what it might be that he was to say to Louis XVIII. This being so, he began by relating to the monarch the history of his visions; and then, having delivered the messages given him by the Archangel, he found himself inspired to add:

“I am to tell you that you are being betrayed by those you trust; and that you will be even more betrayed in the future. A man has just escaped from prison—not, as has been supposed, by the negligence of his jailers, but through their corruption.”

“Yes, I know it,” replied the King. “That is Lavalette.”

“As to that, I do not know; but I know *this*—that, although you are a legitimate prince, yet you are not the legitimate King. You have no right—and you know it very well, although *I* do not know anything more about it than what my angel is telling me to tell you—to be upon the throne of France. And you must restore the throne to

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him to whom it belongs. Also, that you may know that I am telling you the truth about my angel, he orders me to remind you of a certain incident known only to yourself:

“Long ago, when your brother, the late King Louis the Sixteenth, was still the Dauphin, you were both hunting together one day in the forest of Saint Hubert. You had both become separated from your attendants and were alone in a remote glade of the woods. Each of you was carrying a double-barrelled gun; and the Dauphin was riding a little way in front of you, and on a much bigger horse than yours. As you rode thus, behind your brother, there came to you a strong temptation to murder him, that you might become thus the heir to the throne in his stead. Your plan was to shoot him in the back and then to fire off the other barrel of your weapon into the air, and to give it out that he had been shot by some stranger at whom you had immediately fired, but who had escaped. Fortunately, though, you were foiled in your design by the intervening branch of a tree; and then before you could carry out your purpose, you fell in with the Dauphin’s followers and had no further chance of being alone with him. All the same you did not abandon your intention of killing him for a long time, but nourished it in secret until he was married and a son had been born to him—when, at length, you despaired of being able to effect your purpose and put it away from you. Not until then did you give it up.”

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On hearing this, the King burst into tears and seized the other by the arm.

“Oh, God! Oh, God! What you tell me is true!” he cried. “Only God Himself, and you and I know this thing which has been hidden in my heart. Swear to me that you will keep it a secret!”

“Very well, if you wish it,” answered Martin. “But since then you have continued to sin in the same way by wrongfully usurping the crown from him to whom it belongs by right. You must restore it to him or evil will descend upon your house. What is more, I am to say to you that you are not to attempt to be crowned or anointed, because, if you do, you will be punished for your sacrilege by falling down dead during the ceremony.”

Now, not only did Louis XVIII know at this time of the existence of his brother's son, Louis XVII, but, at the very moment of his conversation with Martin, an emissary of Louis XVII had by the King's orders, been arrested and thrown into prison by Decazes—who, the willing servant of his master, is said to have been entirely in the sovereign's confidence respecting his unfortunate nephew. Be that as it may, King Louis promised Martin that he would not be crowned; and that in this, at any rate, he kept his word, history itself is witness. For, albeit he had busied himself with planning the details of his coronation ever since 1795 (the date of the false Dauphin's death in the Temple) and although the preparations for



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it were being hastened forward in that spring of 1816, yet they were forthwith countermanded, and nothing more was ever heard of them. As we know, Louis XVIII was never crowned at all.

Oddly enough, since 1793 no actual ruler of France has died by a natural death in his bed—with the single exception of Louis XVIII himself—a fact which tends to confirm a prophecy to this effect made by Blessed Marguèrite Marie, the Saint of the Sacred Heart, to Louis XIV, as far back as 1671. And it is supposed that Louis XVIII was alone saved from this fate by his refusal to be crowned, notwithstanding that the preparations for his coronation were thus far advanced.

Before leaving the sovereign, moreover, Martin, in response to Louis XVIII's request for advice as to his future conduct, told him to beware of those by whom he was surrounded, and particularly of one of his Ministers who would, one day, be accused of a certain horrible crime. Of which advice the King was fated to have the best of reason for regretting his neglect—if he was not destined, even, to be actually a partner in that very crime thus foretold by the peasant of Gallardon!

After his audience of the King, Martin was waylaid by Decazes who wanted to know what had passed between them. This information the seer refused to give him, whereupon the Minister asked him if he had received any revelation about himself, Decazes. To which the other



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answered reluctantly that his angel bade him say that, if Decazes got his deserts, he would be hanged—a reply which, viewed in the light of subsequent events, a few years later, would appear in the opinion of many to have been a sort of prophecy!

These events, I need hardly say, were the murder of the Duc de Berry at the door of the Opera-house in Paris on February 13, 1820, and the trial of his assassin, Louvel; a tragedy that, in the scandal to which it gave rise, has no parallel except, perhaps, in that of the late Archduke Rudolph's death at Mayerling. But this is not the place to enter into all the details of that bygone *cause célèbre*. Suffice it to say that the scandal of it centred according to the commonly accepted belief, round the question of Louis XVII, the son of Louis XVI, and of the Duke de Berry's having become acquainted with the fact that he was still alive. For it was said at the time that the Duke, having found out that his cousin was yet in existence, had signified his intention of abdicating his rights to the throne in favour of the son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette; and that Louis XVIII and Decazes were guilty of conniving at his murder in consequence.

After this expedition to Paris, Martin, having done his duty, returned home to his farm at Gallardon where he

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was let to live his life in tranquillity until after the demise of Louis XVIII and the accession of Charles X.

On the coming to the throne, however, of the latter, Martin was ordered by the new king to divulge to him the secret of his interview with Louis XVIII; with which command, Martin, who had never been forbidden by his angel to reveal the thing but had only kept it to himself so long as King Louis had been alive for the sake of his promise, now felt himself at liberty to comply. But no sooner had he done so than he had cause to repent it, for the new ruler of France threatened to have him arrested as a political intriguer and an impostor. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Charles X knew perfectly well that this was not the case; since he also now received other communications from the seer of Gallardon, threatening him with the direst retribution upon himself and all his family unless justice were done and the rightful monarch restored to the throne of France. To these repeated warnings, however, he turned a deaf ear; until, at length, in the fateful July of 1830, Martin was told by the Angel that an upheaval was at hand in which the stiff-necked ruler would be submerged together with those nearest and dearest to him. The seer was also informed that Charles X would flee from Paris, and, on his flight, would send one of his general officers, Auguste de Larochejacquelin, to consult with him. To whom he was to say that, "The King had no other course open to him but to flee; that the

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Duc d'Angoulême would die in exile, and that the Duc de Bordeaux would never reign."

It was in vain that Martin sent word to warn the King, ere it should be too late, of the disaster that menaced him. At that moment, too, everything looked well for the French and their ruler, whose popularity appeared greater than it had ever been on account of the successful storming of Algiers by the royal troops, with whom were the Duc d'Aumale and the Duc de Montpensier. So that Martin was only derided for his gloomy Cassandra-like utterances. And then, almost without any warning, there broke out the revolution on the last day of the month, a Saturday.

That night was passed by the fugitive king at Rambouillet whence he despatched Larochejacquelin, as had been foretold by the Angel, to Martin, a few miles away at Gallardon. And Martin told him the things he had been told to tell, including this, that "The reign of the Bourbons has come to an end, and if the King opposes the revolution by force he will only be answerable for the blood thus uselessly shed." And so Charles X fled, instead, to England, surrendering his nephew's birthright to Louis Philippe.

Some months later, in November, the Angel appeared again to Martin to say that he, Martin himself, was about to be tried by many tribulations; which soon came true, the seer being forced to leave his farm and to take refuge

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at Versailles from the fury of those who clamoured for his arrest as a "Legitimist" plotter. Here he remained until the storm passed and he was able to go home again; but not before he had received other revelations, including that of the Pope's death—which occurred on November 30, 1830. Until 1833 Martin lived quietly at Gallardon, and then, once more, the Angel came to tell him that the real King of France was not only still alive, but that he was in the country, at Saint Arnoult, and that the seer was to go to him without delay. He would recognise him, said the Angel, by three signs or marks that he bore upon his person—a scar upon his chin, and the signs known as those of "the lion" and "the dove."

But Martin was unwilling to make the short journey to Saint Arnoult on account of his uncertainty of being able to identify these marks even if he should see them; and so he hesitated a while, until, on September 27, he was ordered, once more, to comply with his previous instructions. This he did, unwillingly enough, and went to Saint Arnoult to a house indicated to him by the Angel as that of a woman, Madame de Saint Hilaire, who, as Madame de Rambaud, had been formerly the Dauphin's nurse. As he reached the building, the door of it was opened and there appeared in the aperture a strongly built individual with a scar on his chin and a small moustache, who came forward instantly with a smile of recognition.

"So it is you, my old Martin," he said, holding out his

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hand to the peasant who, recognising him instinctively, raised the hand to his lips. "I knew you at once," continued the man affectionately, "as the person who in my dreams had led me here through Germany. Come in, my friend, and I will show you the signs for which you are looking."

And, so saying, he drew him into the cottage together, I believe, with Martin's son, the doctor who survived until so recently, and of whom more anon. Here the King, Louis XVII—for it was indeed he himself—proceeded to show Martin the promised signs, which were plainly discernible upon his person, being formed by small veins beneath the skin, that of the "lion" being on his chest and the other, that of the "dove" on his thigh.

If the King's hope had been to induce the then usurper to relinquish to him the throne of his fathers, he was bitterly disappointed. Even his sister, the Duchesse d'Angoulême, had refused to admit the possibility of his being alive during the reign of Louis XVIII and Charles X; so it was hardly likely that the son of the infamous "Egalité" would be moved by any considerations of justice towards the son of the monarch who had been betrayed by his father. Throughout, Martin seems to have been impressed with the hopelessness of any attempt in this direction; and it was with a heavy heart that he parted from Louis XVII and returned to Gallardon, there to proclaim his absolute conviction that the man whom he



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had met and spoken with at Saint Arnoult, and no other, was the one and only King of France.

But it was not long before the Government of Louis Philippe became uneasy in regard to the peasant who was telling all who cared to listen to him that Louis XVII, their rightful sovereign, was not dead but alive, and that he was even now come to Paris to claim his own. This was during the autumn and winter of 1833-34; and the men who were in power were determined to silence the ever-increasing rumour of Louis XVII's returning to claim his throne and the allegiance of his subjects.

In the spring of 1834, it was resolved to proceed to extreme measures against Martin, and with this object he was lured into the house of one of Louis Philippe's secret-service agents, the Comtesse d' —, who passed herself off upon him as a devoted partisan of the rightful king—and there slowly poisoned. This process lasted many days, during which the perfidious woman endeavoured to make Martin believe that her voice from behind a curtain of the bed on which he lay dying, was that of his angel.

Unceasingly for hours at a time, she commanded him to say that all he had ever said as to Louis XVII being in existence was a lie, and that his angel had never told him that Louis XVIII and Charles X were usurpers; but that he had done it for a political purpose.

This he steadfastly refused to do, in spite of the anguish

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that he suffered from each fresh administration of the poison in his food and drink; not even when, as happened again and again, the voice behind the curtain whispered to him that, if he did not retract his statements, he would die and be damned, did he weaken. And so he died—in the house to which he had been invited as a guest—faithful to his charge and refusing to save his life by a lie, in the evening of April 24, 1834.

It was the late Count d'Hérisson, compiler of the "Cabinet Noir" who, in 1886, came across Doctor Martin, the seer's son, and interviewed him on the subject of his father, receiving from him a signed statement relative to certain passages in the peasant of Gallardon's life during the reigns of Louis XVIII and Charles X.

In his statement the worthy doctor tells us how in 1857, he met again that same General de Larochejacquelin whom he had seen for the first time many years earlier on the occasion of the General's being sent by Charles X to consult the seer in the night of July 31—August 1, 1830. On their meeting thus, once more, after the lapse of nearly thirty years, the Doctor immediately took the other severely to task for having denied repeatedly the incidents of that night to all who had since questioned him concerning them—for the Doctor had, himself, been present as a boy of fourteen.

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At first the General endeavoured to deny the accusation of concealing the truth. Whereupon, says the Doctor:

“‘Look here, General,’ I persisted, ‘you know that, both in Paris and elsewhere, whenever any one has asked you about your coming from the King to see my father that night in July, 1830, to ask his advice upon the political situation, you have always denied it. But I, at least, have not forgotten it. If I remember rightly there were three of you—yourself and two others.’

“‘No,’ replied the General, now compelled to admit the true facts of the case, ‘there were only two of us, my aide-de-camp and myself.’

“‘All the same,’ said I, ‘it seems to me that there were three men and three horses there.’

“‘Ah, yes, to be sure now you mention it—my old servant was with us.’

“‘And I remember distinctly,’ I went on, ‘that my father in speaking of the King, said to you that his day was over, and that, if he resisted, he would be held answerable by God for the useless bloodshed of it.’

“‘That is all perfectly true,’ answered the General, ‘but you see there were certain conventionalities to be observed—I could not very well help myself—’

“‘Yes, I know what you mean,’ I retorted; ‘that you wanted to keep yourself right with the Comte de Chambord if ever he came to the throne!’

“I was still very angry with him for having made my

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father appear as an impostor; but, presently, he took me aside and asked:

“‘Have you any news of Louis XVII? Do you know where he is?’

“‘No—and if I did, I would not tell you. You have made yourself unworthy of being connected with such a cause as his—’

“‘Come, come, do not lose your temper,’ said the General. ‘When you know what I am going to tell you, you will feel more kindly towards me. Listen to this: When the Duchesse d’Angoulême was on her death-bed, she sent for me and told me, in a voice that was almost inaudible:

“‘“There is a solemn, a most solemn, matter, which I wish to reveal to you, General—as the last word of a dying woman. It is this—my brother is not dead. For years I have been haunted by the knowledge that he is alive—it has been the nightmare of my existence. I want you to promise me that you will not leave a stone unturned to find him. Go and see the Holy Father<sup>1</sup> about it, go

<sup>1</sup> So absolutely convinced was Pope Pius VII of the existence of Louis XVII as late as 1816 that, in the January of that year, when the French Chamber decided to erect an expiatory chapel in memory of Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, Madame Elizabeth and the Dauphin Louis XVII, he remonstrated with the King—Louis XVIII—and obliged him to issue a decree eliminating the last of these; in consequence of which action of the Holy Father the expiatory chapel was dedicated only to the memory of Louis XVI, of the Queen and of Madame Elizabeth. As the Pontiff is said to have expressed it: “If I cannot prevent you from committing a political fraud, I have, at least, the power to stop you from perpetrating a sacrilegious one!”

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and see the children of Martin of Gallardon, search diligently by land and sea, if need be, to find some of our old servants or their descendants—any one who can in any way help my brother's cause by identifying him. For France will never be happy and at peace within herself until he or his are seated upon the throne of his fathers. Swear to me"—here she broke into a storm of tears—"swear to me that you will do what I ask of you. And now that I have told you this I shall die a little easier—the weight upon my conscience seems to me less heavy than it was."'

"The General," continues the Doctor, "wept, himself, in describing to me the unhappy woman's anguish of remorse for her persistent rejection of what she had so long known to be the truth as to her brother. But it was now too late. Nevertheless, I told the General how glad I was to know of the Duchesse d'Angoulême's confession—which brought back to me my father's words when he had said that the sister of Louis XVII would be the most stubborn and the very last of all to admit the honesty of his revelations."



## Chapter Twelve

### CONCERNING LOUIS XVII AND HIS FAMILY

**A**LTHOUGH I have no intention of presuming to attempt the solution of the riddle of "Nauendorff's" identity with the son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, yet there are several points in regard to it which I think it might interest the reader to consider.

Of these the first is the fact that, from 1795—the year of the Dauphin's disappearance, either by death as some would have it in the Temple, or, according to others, his rescue from that dread place by the agency of his sympathisers—his escape and survival were proclaimed by many persons, and, as it would appear, were, even, tacitly accepted as a possibility by several among his own relations.

Moreover, one of the most curious evidences of the attitude of the world at large towards the question is shown by the various medals struck in several countries in commemoration of the ill-starred little prince during the successive periods of the Directory, the Consulate and the Empire—and, even, the Restoration of 1814—not to mention by the omission of the Dauphin's name, by

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order of Louis XVIII in response to the protests of Pius VII, from the mortuary inscription in the Expiatory Chapel.

The first of these medals, according to d'Hérisson, was one struck in Germany by the celebrated Loos, shortly after the reputed escape of Louis XVII from his dungeon in Paris. On one side of this medal was the legend "Louis, second son of Louis XVI, born March 27, 1785"; and, on the other, was an angel standing before a half-raised curtain, signifying the lifting of the veil of mystery in which the young King of France's fate had, for a while, been shrouded. Of the Angel's feet one was planted upon a half extinguished torch—emblematic of life escaping from the extinction which menaced it—and his other is upon a coffin supporting an open book on the page of which may be seen the names "Louis" (the elder brother of Louis XVII, who died in infancy), "Louis XVI, Antoinette, Elizabeth."

The names are those of the four members of the royal family who were really dead; and, as though Loos was resolved to lose no opportunity of emphasising the belief of the German sovereigns and peoples in the survival of Louis XVII, the Angel is represented as writing with a stylus upon the rim of the medal the words, "Restored to Liberty, June 8, 1795."

There were many similar tokens struck and widely circulated in France and Germany during the next twenty

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years. Some were inscribed merely "Louis XVII, King of France" or "Long live Louis XVII!" or, "Down with anarchy! Long live Louis XVII," whilst others bore more elaborate inscriptions in Latin. Of these last, perhaps the most remarkable was one issued by order of Louis XVIII himself during his first return to France in 1814 and intended to impress upon the public mind the demise of his nephew and his own consequent right to the French crown.

In this, however, his intention seems to have been scarcely carried out; for, the artist, by a simple and ingenious device, contrived, under the appearance of obeying the King's instructions, to proclaim to all the world his own conviction and that of the French people of the survival of Louis XVII. On the obverse of the medal was the head of the boy-king, as he had been in 1795, and the reverse was the representation of a broken lily, with the legend in Latin, "He fell as falls a flower, 8 June 1795." But the wily sculptor had represented the flower as bent rather than broken, and not dead or at all withered, but living and vigorous! I think the sculptor or engraver of this particular medal must have been that same Depaulis, the royal medallist, who in 1815 produced another rather like it, bearing the head of Louis XVII on one side, and on the other an angel who carries a crown in his hand and is soaring from out the Temple. Round about the figure of the Angel are three cryptic inscrip-

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tions,—“*Regni tantum jura*,” “*Quam reddat hoeredi*,” “*Ludovicus XVII in vinculis occumbit*”—which, read together in the following order, give us a really amazing result:

“*Ludovicus XVII in vinculis occumbit quam reddat hoeredi regni tantum jura*”; meaning, as well as they can be said to have any definite interpretation, “Louis XVII is let to perish in prison rather than that his heir should be restored to his bare rights.” From which it would seem that, in 1815, when the medal was struck, Louis XVII, at that time alive and in prison, had offered to renounce his rights in favour of his son, and that his offer had been rejected!

Towards the end of 1819, nearly every member of the royal family of France received a letter from “Nauendorff” or, rather, Louis XVII, appealing once more to their loyalty and justice to restore him to the throne of his ancestors. Not that his uncle, Louis XVIII, was by any means ignorant of his existence, seeing that, apart from the luckless prince’s former communication to Louis XVIII in 1816, at the time of Martin’s coming to Paris, the monarch was said to have long had in his possession a casket containing irrefutable proofs—in the shape of documentary evidence of the strongest kind—of his

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nephew's escape from the Temple and of his subsequent removal to Germany.

Be that as it may, Louis XVII's appeal in 1819 elicited no reply whatsoever from any single individual among his relations; of all these, indeed, the only one who was in any way affected by the possibility of "Nauendorff's" being identical with the son of Louis XVI, was the impulsive and headstrong, but brave and honest, Duc de Berry, son of Charles X, Louis XVIII's brother, then the Count of Artois, and heir after him to the throne. Here again, all is hearsay; but it was widely believed at the time that the Duc de Berry, on receipt of "Nauendorff's" letter, at once announced his intention of inquiring into the matter with the utmost thoroughness and, if it should be proved to his satisfaction that "Nauendorff" and Louis XVII were actually one and the same person, of publicly proclaiming the fact and acknowledging him before all the world as the rightful king of France.

Furthermore it was rumoured that, on his making known this determination to Louis XVIII, a frightful scene of mutual recrimination and upbraiding took place between them—in the course of which there were spoken words that neither could easily forget or forgive. The two men had never been sympathetic to each other, and thenceforth the breach between them seemed to be almost beyond healing. Nor was there any room for doubting that the Duke would infallibly keep his word



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and, if need were, that he would unhesitatingly surrender the crown to him whom he believed to be his cousin and lawful sovereign.

Of the relations between the King and his nephew during the ensuing weeks we have no very certain knowledge; but, when in the night of February 19-20, 1820, the Duke was stabbed by Louvel in the entrance to the Opera-house, there arose an outcry throughout Paris against those who were known to have been the most implacably opposed to him for his dispositions towards the exile claimant to the throne—an outcry in which men did not shrink from bracketting the name of the King with that of his favourite and Prime Minister, the Duc Decazes.

Decazes, one of the handsomest men and the most engaging personalities of his time, was then still a young man in his thirties. The son of an obscure *provincial*, he owed his fortune to the great Napoleon's habit of always placing some confidential and reliable agent in a position of trust near the person of each of his relatives to observe and report upon them and upon their conduct to him. With this object Decazes had been chosen by the Emperor to fill the post of secretary to the Imperial Mother, Madame Laetizia; and so well had the youth acquitted himself of his duties that he was retained as an official by Talleyrand and Fouché on the return to power of the Bourbons. And, on the downfall of Fouché,

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Decazes succeeded him as Head of the French police—in which capacity he examined Martin of Gallardon—and was afterwards made Prime Minister.

Whether, as was generally held to be the case, Decazes was guilty of connivance at the murder of the Duc de Berry in compliance with the wishes of his master, Louis XVIII, or not, the consensus of public opinion against him may be estimated from the fact that a proposal to arraign the Prime Minister on a charge of complicity in the Duke's assassination was actually laid upon the table of the Chamber of Deputies by one of its members, Clausel de Coussergues. And although nothing came of Clausel's proposal, yet Decazes was obliged to resign his post in the Government, being given, instead, that of French Ambassador in London where he was "cut" by every one except George IV and the Foreign Office officials. In addition, the sentiments of the royal family itself towards Decazes may be gauged from the accompanying report of one, Guyon, a police-spy at the Tuileries, to the Minister of Police, as quoted by the Comte d'Hérisson:

"March 29, 1820.

"Madame the Duchesse d'Angoulême has had an extremely stormy scene with the King in regard to M. Decazes to whose recall to power she is most bitterly opposed—so much so that His Majesty lost his temper at

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last and forbade his guards to allow *any one whosoever* to have access to him without his orders, adding in his severest manner :

“ ‘Guards, do you understand me?’

“Monseigneur the Comte d’Artois has told the King that he will leave the kingdom if M. Decazes is recalled; and the Duke of Fitz-James has declared that, if M. Decazes returns to Paris he will force him to fight him in a duel. Even the mild and kindly Chateaubriand said of Decazes, ‘He has slipped on blood and will never rise again.’ ”

Soon after the death of the Duc de Berry and the subsequent storm of scandal that raged round the throne, Louis XVIII decided to quieten the tempest by ordering a commission to inquire into the claims upon the royal bounty of those who were said to have done what they could to soften the lot of the Dauphin during his imprisonment in the Temple. This, presumably, was by way of satisfying the French people that Louis XVII was really and truly dead!

The presidency of this commission was entrusted by the King to Decazes himself, and by the latter to his friend the Comte d’Anglès, who had likewise gone over, bag and baggage, to the cause of the Bourbons in 1815. The commission resulted, strange to say, not, as might have been supposed, in the discovery of the body of the

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Prince, or in the elucidation of any hint as to its whereabouts, but simply in a shower of rewards for all who had lent themselves to tormenting him in prison—his guards and his gaolers, excepting only the widow of the unspeakable Simon himself, who was telling everybody how she had rescued the young Prince from her colleagues.

That she really did so is probably the case. And yet nothing that she could do or say could persuade the Duchesse d'Angoulême to accord her the favour of an interview. And of all the persons in any way connected with the Dauphin's incarceration in the Temple, the widow Simon was the only one to go unrewarded for her kindness and affection towards the unhappy small boy!

At this point, the Comte d'Anglès, unable to acquiesce in the prearranged findings of the commission that Decazes had entrusted to him, and sickened by so much perfidy and baseness, resigned his post of Minister of Police and retired into private life. With him went another who, like d'Anglès, was above stooping to such infamies merely to whitewash Louis XVIII's usurpation of his nephew's birthright. This second honest man was the Duc de Richelieu.

As d'Anglès wrote to a friend some years later in regard to the chiefs who had sought to impose so odious a task upon him, "If you knew the bitterness and the persecutions which I have had to endure because I would

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not share in the passions of a certain person or let myself be made the instrument of them! I knew only too well all the ramifications of his detestable, treacherous manœuvres, and I foresaw as clearly as any one—perhaps, better, on account of my position in the police—what evils he might bring upon France. . . .”

As to the escape of Louis XVII from the Temple, there are two theories, both of them fairly tenable. Of these one is that he was smuggled out of prison by the wife of Simon, his gaoler, in the month of January, 1795. Long afterwards, and to the end of her life, Madame Simon always declared this to be the case to all who questioned her upon the subject, maintaining also that if she wished, she could tell what had become of him after her removal of him—hidden beneath a quantity of dirty clothes in the hollow between the rockers of a rocking-horse—from the Temple; but this, she would only reveal to some member of the royal family; for choice, to his sister the Duchesse d'Angoulême. Nevertheless, strange to relate, she was never even granted the opportunity of doing so! Thus, her secret—if, indeed, she had one—died with her, during the twenties of the nineteenth century.

The other story is that Barras, the ex-member of the National Convention and the friend of Josephine de



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Beauharnais, paid a visit to the Temple one evening in the spring of 1795 and took away the boy prisoner with him to a place near Paris, returning thence, the next day, with another boy whom he succeeded in passing off as Louis XVII to the guards who had never even set eyes before upon their prisoner except after dark, the previous night. If this story is to be believed, then we must conclude that Barras, who was then all-powerful in the State, must have been in collusion with the head gaoler of the prison. Personally, I am inclined to believe that Madame Simon's story is the true one, and that she was acting in union with Barras whom Josephine had induced to befriend the orphaned little King. In support of this, I would remind the reader of the testimony of the Englishwoman, Catherine Hyde, Marchioness of Broglio-Solari, to which she swore in London in July, 1840.

In this affidavit, Madame de Broglio-Solari told how she had been formerly attached to the service of Queen Marie Antoinette, who had been used to call her "my little Englishwoman," adding:

"When I was in Brussels with my husband in 1803, we were invited to dinner by Barras, the ex-Director of the French Republic. During the meal, the talk fell upon Bonaparte. Suddenly, Barras, who had been drinking rather heavily, cried, 'Bah! Bonaparte will never succeed in his ambitious projects—for the good reason that the son of Louis XVI is still alive!'

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“Some years later, in 1819 or thereabouts, when I was visiting Queen Hortense<sup>1</sup> at Augsburg, she repeatedly confirmed to me what Barras had said. Among other things, speaking of her mother’s knowledge of the young King’s escape from the Temple, she told me how, when in 1814, the Emperor Alexander and the King of Prussia went to visit the Empress Josephine at Malmaison, they asked her, ‘Who do you think we ought to place upon the throne of France?’ To which she replied without hesitation, ‘The son of Louis XVI, of course!’

“Furthermore, having learned that there was living at Camberwell in London a person claiming to be the son of Louis XVI, and having obtained permission to visit him, I was firmly and perfectly convinced by the proofs then given me by His Royal Highness that he, Charles Louis, Duke of Normandy, formerly known by the name of Nauendorff, is the true son of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette.”

This declaration was sent by Madame de Broglio-Solari to the Duchesse d’Angoulême, but, like so many others, was destined to remain unnoticed by her. Indeed, it would seem that the Duchess’ capacity for feeling anything had been permanently blunted by her own sufferings and the recollection of those of her parents—as witness her absolute indifference to the agonised supplications of Madame de Lavalette for the one word from her

<sup>1</sup> Daughter of Empress Josephine and mother of Napoleon III.

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that was needed to save the life of Lavalette, as well as her rejection of the entreaties of poor Ney's distracted wife! Furthermore, Madame de Broglio-Solari's testimony was but one of a quantity, including similar depositions from a Monsieur Marco de Saint-Hilaire and his wife, formerly Madame de Rambaud—who had known Louis XVII as a child—and others.

Among these, that of Madame de Saint-Hilaire who had, at one time, acted as a kind of "companion" to Joséphine soon after her marriage to General Bonaparte, is especially interesting as bearing upon the future Empress' share in the rescue of the boy King. This she confirms entirely, adding that Fouché, who was later to become Minister of Police, afterwards helped Joséphine to save Louis XVII (upon whom and no other, she always looked as her lawful sovereign) from the talons of her husband, the First Consul, whose intentions towards him were the reverse of those of his wife!

Even the deposition of Madame de Saint Hilaire who had had the charge of the Dauphin from the day of his birth in 1785 until 1792, and with whom, in 1833, she exchanged many mutual reminiscences of his childhood, failed to induce his sister to grant him the only favour he asked of her, a personal interview.

Of his family then, the only member at all inclined to accord him a hearing was the Duc de Berry who was only prevented by death from doing so. But the Duke's

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generous temperament never met with any encouragement from Louis XVIII—not even when, with his last breath, he begged the King to have mercy on Louvel and to spare his life. It must have been a strange scene, that death-bed of the Duke on the sofa in the upper corridor of the Opera-house where, surrounded by a crowd of persons many of whom were strangers to him and who had not enough sense of propriety to withdraw out of earshot during the time the dying prince was making his last pitiful preparations for entering into eternity—including his confession, the details of which they lost no time in repeating for the edification of their fellow miscreants. For let it not be forgotten that, among Catholics, a lay person is as much bound as are the clergy themselves to respect the sanctity and secrecy of any confession they may be so unavoidably unfortunate as to overhear. All the royal family were there, with many other persons besides, not excluding Louis XVIII and his favourite, Decazes—who, himself, had summoned the King to the scene, helping him out of bed and into his clothes. It was noticed how, when the Duchesse de Berry caught sight of Decazes on his making his appearance with Louis XVIII on the scene of the tragedy, she eyed him indignantly and moved away from him as though he had been some poisonous reptile. This, I cannot help thinking, was rather unfair on him; for it is really hardly conceivable that he should have been guilty of actually lending

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himself to procuring her husband's murder. At the same time it is equally established that, some days earlier, the Duke had confided to his aide-de-camp, Monsieur de Mesnars, that he had been frequently warned by anonymous letters of a plot against his life—so it is plain that Louvel was not the only conspirator against him. Personally, though, I fancy that the Duke's harsh treatment of certain officers of the army, who had formerly served under Napoleon, may have had something to do with the matter. Still, in judging the case, one cannot help remembering the message with which the apparition of the Angel entrusted Martin de Gallardon for Decazes, to the effect that "if he got his deserts he would be hanged"; also the revelation made to Louis XVIII by Martin concerning the former's intention of murdering his own brother.

But of all the relatives of Louis XVII none was so consistently and inflexibly opposed to his claims to the throne as was his own sister, the Duchesse d'Angoulême. For whereas even Louis XVIII and Charles X were not unwilling to hold communications with Martin, the seer of Gallardon, the Duchess, their niece, carried her aversion to the subject of her brother's survival to the length of refusing him, as has been said before, the only boon he



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craved of her, that of an interview in order that he might have the chance of proving his identity to her.

Judging, however, from one thing and another it appears probable that her extraordinary line of conduct towards him was due less to indifference than to a kind of mental obsession, the result of her sufferings during the Revolution.

Born in the last days of 1778, Madame Première de France, as she was known until her marriage in 1798 to the Duc d'Angoulême, was a high-strung, nervous child upon whose sensitively receptive mind the terrible events of the early and mid-revolutionary epochs made an impression too frightful to be ever after eradicated from it. She forgave the murderers of her nearest and dearest, forgave them perfectly as became a Christian; but it was not in her power to forget—that is, to escape from the haunting recollection of their onslaughts upon her reason—the events of those days. Nothing which could remind her of the years from 1790–1795 would she allow to intrude its presence upon her; among which, one can only suppose, she must have included any reference to the brother upon whom she had so long looked as dead.

It was said of her at the time of her return to France with her husband and with her uncle Louis XVIII, that she had “pardoned greatly, but it is necessary, too, that she should be able to forget as greatly as she has pardoned.”

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People noticed how beautiful was the attitude of complete resignation to the past with which she bowed herself in prayer at Nôtre Dame de Paris in the hour of her entry into the capital; but on reaching the Tuileries, she was visibly "cold, awkward, harsh" once more. Her constraint was popularly ascribed to the harrowing memories recalled to her by the palace; which was comprehensible enough. But what was not at all comprehensible to the French public was the attitude of the Duchesse d'Angoulême towards those who had sacrificed their all in the royal cause, and who were now flocking to welcome the daughter of Louis XVI in the natural expectation of receiving the reward of their loyalty in the shape of, at least, a gracious reception at the hands of the royal orphan. But in this they were destined to be grievously disappointed.

Madame de Boigne tells how a certain Madame de Chastenay, who had been formerly a playmate of the Duchess, was treated by her in this respect. On their meeting again, after five and twenty years, in the Tuileries, the Duchess inquired of her *quondam* friend, "Tell me, how is your father?" To which the other replied, "He is dead, Madame." "But when did he die?" "Alas! he died upon the scaffold during the Reign of Terror, Madame."

At that, the Duchess started, "as if she had trodden upon a viper"; and, from that day forth, she never

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again addressed so much as a single word to Madame de Chastenay.

The same treatment was accorded by her to others without number of her father's devoted adherents—to surviving officers of the Army of Vendée, to the widows and orphans of others, to Royalists of every kind. Not a word, if it could be avoided, would she throw to them, but only a gesture of horror and aversion. As an instance of her ingratitude we are told how, when she was travelling through Germany on her way back to France, there was presented to her by a German prince a Frenchman called Collin, who had been able to show her mother considerable kindness during the Queen's imprisonment in the Temple. When she set eyes upon poor Collin, however, the Duchess became faint, as from an invincible repugnance; and, on recovering from her indisposition, she explained that "the Frenchman had no wig on—and I cannot stand the sight of short-cut hair!"

There was no more capacity left in her, apparently, for any generous human feelings after her sufferings during the Revolution. It would seem that, in those dark days, something must have died in her, once for all; something which could never again come to life. Even in the comparatively happiest moment of her after-existence, that in which she reached the palace at Mittau where Louis XVIII was living as the guest of the Emperor Paul of Russia, she was not allowed to forget

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some things. The first person, after the King and the Duc d'Angoulême, whom she encountered there was the Abbé Edgeworth—the "*Abbé Edjorce ou de firmont*," as she wrote of him—the same who had attended Louis XVI in his last moments; and, although the future Duchess broke into tears at sight of the intrepid Irish priest, she afterwards sent for him to her apartments, and had a long talk with him upon the subject of her father.

In strange contrast to her behaviour towards those of her compatriots who had been loyal to Louis XVI are certain words, spoken by Madame de France, as she was then, to the representatives of the Emperor of Germany (Francis II) who had been sent by him to receive her from the hands of the French Government at Bâle in December, 1795:

"I am profoundly sensible," said she, "of the kindness of his Imperial Majesty . . . I will do all I can by good behaviour and thankfulness, to show myself worthy of his goodness—and to prove to him that such a thing as ingratitude has no place in my heart."

Unfortunately, ingratitude was the strongest feature in her whole character—in truth, had she but shown herself less brutally ungrateful to so many of her uncle's subjects, it is quite possible that the Bourbons might be still upon the throne of France to-day.

## Chapter Thirteen

COUNTESS CHARLOTTE KIELMANSEGGE:  
A NAPOLEONIC MYSTERY

**I**T was in 1868 when I was in Dresden with my mother and sister, that I came in contact with one of the most "intriguing" mysteries that I have ever known.

A little distance from the town itself—a walk of half an hour or so—among the wooded hills, to which Dresden has since thrown out its suburbs, was an exquisite shady vale, the "Plauensche Grund," through which the stream of the Weisseritz meandered rather than flowed; and, at the farther end of the "Grund," rising almost from the water's edge, stood a walled, gloomy-looking mansion known as the "Plauen—or Wasserpalais." At first sight, even in the sunshine of an August noontide, the building had so forbidding an aspect as to give the impression of being either a penitentiary or an asylum of some kind.

Surrounded entirely by a high wall painted black, the house itself was all of a deep dingy ochre—*piutosto*, gamboge—its windows and cornices being also picked out in black; as were, likewise, the heavy iron shutters and bars which protected the lower windows of it. The roof, alone, varied from the rest of the colour-scheme, being



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of a sombre red. The general appearance of the "Wasserpalais" or "Water-palace" was indicative of long neglect—as was also a so-called *restaurant* which stood next to it, separated from it by the sinister wall in which there was a door leading from the deserted, weed-grown "garden" of the one into that of its ill-favoured neighbour. At once, the imaginative sightseer was forced to the conclusion that the palace must have a ghost to it—if, indeed, there were not one somewhere about the *restaurant*, too! As well there might be; for it was here that some of the fiercest fighting occurred in the great battle of August 26, 1813, when the French garrison of Dresden made a sortie against the Allies in this same valley—but only to be repulsed with terrible loss by the Austrian and Russian cavalry.

In 1868 the "Water-palace" was deserted save for a caretaker and his wife who were looking after it for the owner, Count Lynar, to whose grandmother, Countess Charlotte Kielmansegge, it had belonged, and who had died there five years earlier on April 26, 1863. It is this Countess Kielmansegge who was one of the central figures of the mystery to which I have alluded; the other being no less a person than Napoleon himself.

The whole life of this extraordinary woman was one long romance; her entire energies being absorbed by her overwhelming hero-worship for the greatest figure in modern history. And there were even darker sides to it,

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if report is to be believed, than her admiration for Napoleon—*Etoile de ma vie*, as she invariably spoke of him to the last hour of her existence upon earth.

At Dresden, the undercurrent of rumours concerning the devoted Countess constantly made mention of one particularly sinister detail. It was asserted that, ever since 1840, when she purchased the "Water-palace" from its former owner, there used to present himself there regularly once a week, a man, masked and wearing evening clothes, who was as invariably admitted without a word to the presence of Countess Kielmansegge, in the lofty drawing-room at the end of which she sat waiting for him. Her own dress was invariably the same—a loose, wrapper-like garment of black and grey wool mixture; and on her head she wore a frilled mob-cap of a fashion long gone by.

Nothing was ever said, according to those who were supposed to know, either by the aged Countess or the man in evening clothes on these occasions of his weekly visit to her. Unannounced, he would enter the room and, bowing, advance to where she was awaiting him in her high-backed chair; inspect her appearance in silence a moment, and then, with another bow, retire. The man was the public executioner of Dresden, so it was whispered; and his duty was to see that, around her neck and hidden from the sight of others, the old Countess wore a light halter, of black silk, intertwined with strands of gold. This halter, according to tradition, had been placed there,

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many, many years before,—when she had been condemned to wear it in perpetuity as a punishment for the murder of her first husband, Count Lynar, by poisoning him with a cherry-tart on August 1, 1800, at his estate of Lübbenau in Lower Lusatia.

But, indeed, Countess Kielmansegge's history was such as to justify any, even the strangest, stories about her.

Born on May 8, 1777, Countess Charlotte Augusta Kielmansegge was the only child of a Saxon official, Peter Augustus von Schönberg, her mother being by birth a Countess Hoym who was famous for her remarkable beauty. It was through this fatal comeliness of her mother's that Charlotte Augusta became eventually involved in her first hare-brained escapade at an age when other young girls are generally absorbed by thoughts of nothing more serious than chocolates and subalterns.

The way of it was this:

In 1776, a year before Charlotte's birth, a certain Prince Xavier d'Agdolo who had long been the devoted and honourable friend of her mother, Frau von Schönberg, was entrusted by the Dowager Electress of Saxony, the Elector's mother, with a secret mission to Ratisbon. The object of this mission has never yet been satisfactorily cleared up. All that is known of it for certain is that it had to do with a plot for the dethronement of the Elector; but whether by co-operation of the Bavarian Government or that of the Empress Maria Theresia, herself, is

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one of the unsolved mysteries of European history. Be that as it may, however, on the day before that on which d'Agdolo was to leave Dresden for Ratisbon, there arrived a courier of Frederick the Great at the Saxon capital, bringing with him a detailed copy of certain papers relating to the conspiracy, of which papers d'Agdolo was to take the originals with him to Ratisbon. These copies the Prussian messenger handed over to the astounded Elector, who, when he had mastered their contents, gave orders for the instant arrest of the unsuspecting d'Agdolo. This was on September 16, 1776; and the next day, d'Agdolo was transferred from Dresden to the fortress of Königstein—there to drag out the rest of his days in solitary confinement until death came to his release, twenty-four years later, on August 27, 1800.

To return to the Schönbergs. After learning of d'Agdolo's summary, unaccountable arrest, and of his subsequent removal from the society of his fellow creatures, Frau von Schönberg was never the same; from that moment she appeared to have lost all interest in life, and was soon no more than the shadow of her former self. Nevertheless, she did not die soon, but pined away during thirteen long years of hopeless regret for d'Agdolo, until the twelfth of November, 1789, when she passed away at Lausa in Upper Saxony.

So that the twelve-year-old Charlotte was left with only her father to superintend her upbringing; but Herr von

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Schönberg, strangely enough, had no fondness for his daughter, being engrossed in his career and other interests. Thus she was left very much to herself and, in consequence, sought what comfort she could in the memory of her mother whom she had adored, and the recollection of whose love for her now became all in all to the lonely child.

And then, one day, as she was consoling herself by going through her mother's small personal belongings, she came across a miniature in a secret drawer of the table which had always stood by Frau von Schönberg's bed—a miniature of d'Agdolo. Astonished by her discovery she took it to the woman who had been her mother's maid, from whom she learned the whole pitiful story of Frau von Schönberg's affection for the prisoner of Königstein. On hearing it, Charlotte's mind was made up; come what might she would procure the escape of the man whose friendship had meant so much to the mother whose memory she worshipped. For three whole years she pondered her plans with the perseverance that was afterwards so characteristic of her; until 1793, when, being then sixteen, she was taken to her first court ball and the long-desired opportunity seemed to have arrived for carrying out her project. But she was not destined to have the happiness of liberating d'Agdolo.

Having imparted her design to one of her partners at the ball, a young lieutenant, he all but ruined the con-



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finding "Backfisch" by giving her an appointment for the following day—in order, ostensibly, to arrange the matter—at a certain house in Dresden; into which house on her arriving at it, something in its aspect warned her from entering—her Guardian Angel, one would be inclined to think!—and so she turned back from it. But her visit to the place had been seen by an unscrupulous person who told others of it, with the result that Charlotte became ill with brain-fever through horror and shame and disappointment in human nature. Never again did she quite trust herself to any one, nor did she repeat her attempt to rescue d'Agdolo from his cell at Königstein. At this period she is described as having "an unusually lovely complexion with dark brown hair and eyes that were almost black; wonderful eyes in which ruddy fires of intelligence and passion leaped and fell from time to time." Her figure, also was superb; "she bore herself like an Andalusian"—so that her powers of fascination are scarcely to be wondered at.

It was not long before a husband was found for her in the person of Count Rochus Lynar, a young and wealthy Lusatian noble; they were married in May, 1796, and in February of the following year a son, Hermann, was born to them. And now there took place an odd incident. For, soon after the birth of her son, Countess Charlotte left her husband and went to travel in Italy with the artist Grassini; but I believe there was nothing really



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scandalous in their relations to each other, beyond the social impropriety of their thus wandering about together. For Grassini's was far too essentially "detached" a temperament for him to have any but the most sensitive of relations with the opposite sex. But, unhappily for Countess Charlotte, there was lying in wait for her, there in Italy, a temptation stronger than any she had ever yet known—far stronger than herself, or than anything else in her character or in her associations.

For, as under the guidance of Grassini she was roaming from place to place, filling her mind with the delights of pictures and statuary, they arrived at the little town of Campo Formio, near Udine where General Bonaparte was negotiating his first treaty with the representatives of the Papal States, Austria and Sardinia. From the hour of this, her first meeting, with the conqueror of Europe, Charlotte was lost to every other consideration but that of her love for the "Man of Destiny" whose personality was thenceforth to enslave her heart and her imagination. Husband, children, fair fame, religion—all were as nothing to her in comparison with the victor of Lodi, Arcola and Rivoli—and in this frame of mind, discontented and stirred to the depths of her being, she returned home to Lynar, himself only twenty-four years of age.

Nothing happened, though, until the battle of Marengo had been fought and won, which event seems to have enflamed Charlotte's admiration for the conqueror to a point

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at which she could no longer endure the society of her husband; and, on the first of August of that same year, 1800, he died suddenly—of poison administered to him, as has been said, according to the universal report and belief, by his wife. Of this report, which has never been satisfactorily disproved, Charlotte was well aware; and to the end of her life, she was wont to discuss it with those about her. Unhappily, however, for her reputation, she never rejected it with any great firmness, but would smile over it as though with pride in her secret. She was even known to go to the length of boasting that it would be an easy enough matter for her to kill any one by reason of her knowledge of poisons—a fact which was confirmed after her death, by the finding, among other similar phials, of a bottle of oil of vitriol under a step of the stairs in the Wasserpalais.

It has been proved, in regard to the common belief of the Countess Charlotte's having made away with her first husband that her servants testified to having often, of nights, long years after, in the Wasserpalais, known her to be suffering in a manner suggestive both of dreadful remorse and, also, of something in the nature of nocturnal visions—the return to earth of some reproachful spirit, as it would seem, from beyond the grave. In addition to these things, she became, during a part of her lonely old age, entirely given over to incantations and to attempting to call up to her the long dead figures of her youth.



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Moreover, in her will, she left everything she could—as if in atonement for her reputed crime—not to her children by her second husband, Count Kielmansegge, but to Albert, Count Lynar the grandson of the man she was believed to have murdered.

Only two years after Count Lynar's mysterious death, Countess Charlotte married again. Her second husband was a Hanoverian, Ferdinand Count Kielmansegge, a man of almost exactly her own age but her antithesis in every other respect. A staunch and loyal British subject, whilst Charlotte was completely dominated by her enthusiasm for the First Consul and all that he represented, it is hardly to be wondered at that Count Kielmansegge and his wife were constantly at daggers' drawn upon the subject of politics. Feeling ran high between them; and so it went on until Austerlitz and Jena when the glory of Napoleon was become such as fairly to dazzle his perfervid admirer of the Campo Formio days. Thus Kielmansegge and his wife, from being merely estranged, became intolerable to each other; and at length they separated, he remaining with their two children, a boy and a girl in Hanover, and she returning to Dresden in the intention of devoting herself to the furtherance of Napoleon's interests. For nothing else would satisfy her

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but to identify herself with the great man and the almost superhuman splendour of his achievements.

It was in May, 1807, during the interval between the battles of Jena and Friedland, that Countess Charlotte met her enchanter once more when he passed through Dresden on his way northward. Napoleon was pleased to accept her homage affably; he well remembered their former meeting at Campo Formio and was touched by her admiration of him. Also, he was greatly flattered and amused by the presentation to him of the following cryptograms upon his name composed by Dassdorf, the librarian of the Saxon monarch:—

“Nationis Allemanicæ Protector Orbis Legislatoꝝ Europæ Ordinatioꝝ” and “Numine Anniente Pacem Orbi Laetanti Excelsus Offert Napoleon.”

Having renewed her acquaintance with the Emperor, Countess Charlotte proceeded to ingratiate herself with the French administration of Germany that ensued upon the battle of Friedland by entering into relations with Fouché, the imperial Police Minister, in the character—since the word must be said—of an agent of the secret or political branch of his department. At least that is the belief to which one is forced on the face of it, seeing that both Fouché and his rival in police matters, Savary, were equally well acquainted with Countess Charlotte from about this time.

After the meeting with Napoleon at Dresden, however,

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she seems to have gone back to her husband in Hanover—whether of her own initiative or in accordance with instructions received from Fouché, it is difficult to say—and to have remained there a short while; but her influence upon the Emperor appears to have resulted favourably for her own country, as witness the apportioning to Saxony of land in what had been formerly East Prussia by the Treaty of Tilsit.

During the next few years the Countess continued to divide her time between Hanover and Dresden with, now and then, a visit to other places. In 1809 she is said, when at the baths of Töplitz, to have forced her acquaintance upon Napoleon's brother, Louis Bonaparte, the King of Holland, who at first was undecided whether to consider her as a spy set upon him by his brother or by his wife, Queen Hortense, the mother of Napoleon III. Ultimately, though, she won him over and they were firm friends ever after. But, besides politics, she was devoted to music, as is shown by her friendship with Beethoven to whom, on December 17, 1810, she sent a wreath of silver laurel-leaves in token of the delight she had derived from his opera of "Fidelio." This wreath she despatched soon after her return from a visit to Napoleon at Saint Cloud where he was staying with the Empress Marie Louise. In order to raise the money for the expenses of this visit, Countess Charlotte sold one of her estates, Spremberg, the sale of which enabled her to go to

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France with a retinue and jewels fit for a royal personage. But, through it all, whatever may have been the Countess' sins in other directions, there is one point which can not be too strongly urged in justice to her memory in regard to her relations with Napoleon; which is that, from first to last, they may be accepted as having been purely platonic. Even if, in after years, there was put forward a person calling himself Bonaparte and claiming to be a son of Countess Charlotte, he was absolutely repudiated by her—which, considering her pride in her intimacy with Napoleon would hardly have been the case had there been any real foundation for such a claim.

It is true, however, that this "Bonaparte" was not the only person who claimed such a relationship to her. Towards the end of her life there came forward, in the character of her son, one, Carl Heinrich Schönberg,<sup>1</sup> whose claims her heirs were unable entirely to reject; so that after her death he was adjudged a sum of ten thousand

<sup>1</sup> Carl Heinrich Schönberg was born on September 6, 1816. According to the Countess' statement he was the son of a French couple who had been banished from France by Louis XVIII; they were recommended to her charity by Fouché, then French Minister at Dresden and an old friend of Countess Charlotte, who took them under her protection at her estate at Schmochtitz, where, soon after, Carl Heinrich came into the world. Personally, I am willing to accept the Countess' word upon the subject—but the fact that, from that date, we hear no more of either of his parents, certainly makes it a little difficult! As to the other claimant, Hans Graf, although his likeness to Napoleon was most striking, there is no real proof of any kind that he was the son of Countess Charlotte. Moreover, he was even repudiated by Napoleon III, who was willing on the other hand to acknowledge both Morny and Walewski as being related to him!

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thalers out of the Countess' property by the Saxon Government. All his life he lived on one of her estates, Dürrhennersdorf, as a cooper, and there he died in 1872 as a tenant of the person to whom Countess Charlotte had long before sold the estate. The fate, however, of the other claimant, "Napoleon Bonaparte," commonly known as Hans Graf, was a less happy one. After a fruitless, life-long struggle to obtain recognition, first from Countess Charlotte and then from the Bonaparte family—especially from Napoleon III—and later, from the Countess' heirs-at-law—he ended his days in December, 1864, by drowning himself in the Elbe.

From Saint Cloud, where her reception at the hands of the Emperor is said to have been "most gracious and so friendly as to be almost that of an intimate and familiar," she returned to Saxony more resolved than ever upon a policy of *Ad majorem Napoleonis gloriam*, so to speak.

At the end of the following year, 1811, the storm-clouds which were destined to usher in the tempest of Napoleon's downfall, began to darken the political horizon of Europe. And, when, in the ensuing summer, the Emperor came to Dresden to take command of the army that was to invade Russia, Countess Charlotte foregathered there with the crowd of vassal sovereigns and princes to meet



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him and to do homage to him. But her expectations that he would honour her with a visit at her country-seat at Neusalza were fated to be disappointed, albeit she is said to have made the most magnificent preparations to receive him. For he had no time to lose—as well he knew—the campaign having begun at least a couple of months too late, and so he was obliged to hurry on across Germany towards the Niemen.

Many months passed before Countess Charlotte met the Emperor again—at the time of his successes at Bautzen and Lützen in May, 1813; and, during his subsequent stay in Dresden. Later on, in August, there came the battle there, followed by the series of isolated French defeats which prepared the way for the great “Battle of the Nations” at Leipzig in October.

It was not until after his first abdication that Napoleon saw his admirer once more, when she followed him to Elba and became a member of his small island court, her enthusiasm in no wise dimmed by her hero's misfortunes. What part, if any, that she had in the preparation for his escape thence is not known for certain; but we may be sure that she was in the secret of it, and that nothing which she could do to ensure the success of it was left undone. Her presence in Elba was attested, so lately as 1863, by one of her maids who was then still living, and who used to tell how she had accompanied her mistress to the Emperor's place of exile. Further, Countess

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Charlotte went, herself, in that same year, 1814-1815, to Vienna, there to petition the Congress in Napoleon's favour, and to plot for him with the Imperial family. Even after Waterloo, she was not discouraged, but continued to work for him and for his release from Saint Helena—to the great displeasure of the Austrian authorities, especially of Count Bombelles who afterwards became the husband of Marie Louise, and who, in compliance with orders from his master, refused to allow the Countess to remain in Austrian territory when she asked for a passport to enable her to visit Marshal Savary then living in exile at Grätz in Styria.

Even Napoleon's death did not put an end to her warfare on his behalf in the person of his son. In 1830, when Charles X was compelled to abdicate the throne of France, Countess Charlotte bent all her energies to procuring the succession to it of the Duke of Reichstadt. Hers would appear, in all probability, to have been the brain to conceive, and the will to carry to an all but successful issue, the Duke's attempted escape from Vienna which, in our own day, furnished Rostand with the material for his play "L'Aiglon." But all these things, together with the history of her friendship with Napoleon, were recorded in her voluminous diaries—which, alas! are inaccessible to the historian, although we know of their existence from the mention of them in the Countess' will. Her "Mémoires" she was known to have concealed in the

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cellar of the Wasserpalais; but no trace of them has ever, to the best of my knowledge, been brought to light. And the diaries are, as I take it, still in the hands of her descendants.

It was after the tragedy of Saint Helena that Countess Charlotte took up the study of incantation as a means by which to call up to her the souls of Napoleon and of others. But from these practices she was rescued for a time by—of all persons!—that same Italian painter, Grassini, in whose company, nearly half a century earlier, she had first met the conqueror of Upper Italy. For Grassini, who lived in a villa (afterwards the ruinous *restaurant* next to the Wasserpalais) in the “Plauensche Grund,” and for the sake, doubtless, of whose memory she purchased the house in which her last days were passed, persuaded her to turn her thoughts from the Black Art to religion.<sup>1</sup>

But her love of plotting was never extinct as long as she lived. Even in her seventy-second year, in 1848, she seems to have been still deep in political and police intrigues, as is shown by the following curious anecdote in “Gartenlaube,” a German year-book, for 1868:—

<sup>1</sup> After Grassini's death, though, in 1838, the Countess returned to spiritualism, dabbling in it at intervals until her own demise, five-and-twenty years later.

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On November 18, 1848, the mayor of Leipzig received a letter from Countess von Kielmansegge asking to be permitted to contribute a hundred thalers to a subscription that was being raised for the widow and children of Robert Blum who had been executed by order of Prince Windischgrätz in Vienna on the third of the same month. In this letter the Countess also expressed her sympathy for the unfortunate man's family and added that she would at all times be happy to be of use to them in any way she could. Later on, she invited Frau Blum and her children to visit her at the Wasserpalais in order that they might become better acquainted with each other. In answer to Frau Blum's acceptance of this invitation, the following letter was delivered to her. It was in Countess Charlotte's handwriting, and ran:—

“My dear Friend,

“I have only this instant received your note, and am sending off an answer to be posted to you at once by a mounted messenger so as to catch the next train. Come, come to me with your dear children—there is room for all of you in my heart! Let me see as much of you as you can—morning, noon and night!

“Your true friend at Plauen nr Dresden.”

On arriving in Dresden, Frau Blum went with her children to a hotel, and afterwards drove out to Plauen where she was met by her pretended friend who insisted that



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she should remain there with her family. That evening, they all went to supper at the neighbouring "Reisewitzer" restaurant with the proprietor of which Frau Blum had some acquaintance. Taking her aside, the man entreated her not to entrust herself in the Countess' society, who, he declared, was a spy of Windischgrätz's and had no other motive for her friendship than that of obtaining information as to the Viennese revolutionary party of which Blum had been one of the leaders. Notwithstanding his earnestness, however, Frau Blum refused to believe him, and went back with her hostess to the Wasserpalais.

After she had gone to bed that night, though, she received a visit from Countess Charlotte who began to talk to her about "love and the community of souls which extends beyond the grave." And then suddenly, we are told, the Countess "with a diabolical expression of countenance," asked Frau Blum if she really believed that her husband was dead. To which she answered that she had no choice but to do so. Whereupon, the Countess assured her that she knew for a fact, owing to her correspondence with Prince Windischgrätz, that Robert Blum was still alive.<sup>1</sup> At which amazing statement, the poor widow was naturally much perturbed and agitated. But her "friend" soon left her, and withdrew for the night with-

<sup>1</sup> As is well known, Blum fell dead at the first volley from the firing-party, in the "Brigittenau," with two balls in his heart and one in his right eye.



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out further satisfying her agonised desire to know more.

The next day the two women went together into Dresden to lunch at the "Nuremberg" hotel. Here, Countess Charlotte seeing the Spanish Minister at the other end of the room, walked over to him and they had a whispered conversation. Presently, after she had returned to her guest and the meal had begun, Frau Blum was called out of the room by a stranger who, telling her that he had been a friend of her husband, slipped into her palm a note as follows:—

"Dear Madam,

"You are in fearful hands. Come at once to my house with your children!

Doctor N——"

This second warning was too much for Frau Blum who no longer hesitated to take leave of the Countess and to repair with her family to the kind doctor's dwelling. And we are told that he, together with other friends of the widow, afterwards sent a letter to Countess Charlotte forbidding her ever again to tempt the confidences of Frau Blum or her children.

Who shall say what was really the underlying motive for the Countess' assumption of friendliness towards Blum's widow? Was she acting as an agent of the Austrian Government with the intention of supplying it with information as to the Viennese revolutionaries in obe-

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dience to the directions of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, Prince President of France—as a civility in return for the good-will of that same Austrian Government in regard to the French expedition against the Roman rebels in those April days of '49? Possibly.

Be that as it may, Countess Charlotte withdrew almost entirely thenceforth from the society of her fellow beings, and gave herself up instead to writing her "Mémoires" and to alternating Spiritualism (and, that, of the most lurid kind!) with preparing for death. It was at this time that she had the device which she had chosen for herself, that of "Seule et Soumise," painted upon the ceiling of her drawing-room in the Wasserpalais; where she was visited, weekly, according to those about her, by the masked man in the evening clothes, and whence she was only once known to issue—when she drove to a photographer's in Dresden, Krone of the Friedrich's Allée, and had her likeness taken, telling him that he would be sure to make a considerable profit from the sale of such photographs in the days to come after her decease!

But she did not long survive her visit to the photographer's studio which took place at the end of 1862; for death came to her on April 26, 1863, in her eighty-sixth year. May her restless spirit have found pardon and the peace which passeth understanding!

## Chapter Fourteen

### A FAIRY TALE—AND AN EARTHQUAKE

**O**NE of the greatest restrictions entailed by a working life is that of curtailing almost to vanishing point the time one can devote to one's friends. But the other day I snatched an hour to spend with one of the most attractive women I know, Comtesse M——, eighty-seven years of age, lonely and almost poor, but retaining all the grace and charm of a particularly charming day—the mid-nineteenth century in France. Her pretty blue eyes, still sparkling with interest in life, scarcely serve her at all; when she receives a letter she has to wait for knowledge of its contents until some friend turns up to read it to her. She lost her husband soon after their marriage, and her only son, a delightful boy, when he was just twenty-one. Her kind French relations, the official heirs, took possession of the M—— château, with all the family revenues, after his death, and refused even to let her take away the little objects associated with her dead. But all these sorrows have merely matured and sweetened the dear woman, and now, when the waiting is so nearly over, she has only kind and indulgent words to say of those who treated her badly, only a smile of grati-

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tude for the Providence that has deprived her in her old age of all family companionship and affection.

Truly she always seems to me one of the happiest people I know, and it is a red-letter day for me when I can climb to her sky apartment on the Viminal and get her to talk about events that were long past when I was young. The sky apartment hangs so high that from its windows one looks right over the city to the Janiculum Hill and St. Peter's; and few are the evenings, even in this dark and stormy winter we are having, when some gorgeous rent does not part the clouds and show the calm green and golds of the sunset beyond. In the summer these sunsets were a path of liquid crimson, against which the tall stone pines stood out black and tall like warriors watching a sacrifice. And we used to sit and gaze at it till the stars came out, unwilling to lose one last effect of the lingering beauty. In this stormy weather our sunsets are not red; but the day seldom closes without granting us that glimpse of changeless, jewelled peace brooding far above and beyond the dark rent mantle of our storms. Nearer at hand, from my friend's windows one looks down on all that is left of the Barberini gardens, which used to cover many acres of land now built over with new streets; but the remnant is noble and spacious enough, rich in flowery parterres between high box hedges, gay with orange and magnolia trees, and dignified by one great pine, the last of those that had grown here

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for hundreds of years, so towering in height and perfect in shape and foliage that it dwarfs even the Palace beyond and is still the dominating feature of the whole scene.

For the last thirty years Mme. M—— has lived here, carrying out the recipe for happiness of a country woman of hers who said, "*Il me faut dans ma journée beaucoup de ciel!*" The blue so near above—Heaven's peace in the heart—these two make for great serenity of mind and vigour of body. Indeed the rare people who, by virtue of love and conformity, have been enabled to banish all personal desires from their lives, have also banished the executioner, Worry; and to their own and their friends' surprise, often live on to an abnormal age and retain to the very end the charm of youth without youth's restlessness. They are delightful to contemplate, because they show us so clearly what human nature, even with all its limitations, is meant to be in this, its transient mortal stage.

My friend has an old servant who seems to her quite young and whom she still addresses as "Ma petite"; but Lucille is quite seventy and is as affectionately domineering as these faithful ancient tyrants usually are. She bewails loudly the youthful giddiness of her mistress, who in spite of defects in sight and less than steady footsteps, insists on flying up and down in the elevator all by herself, goes out to church—and has to cross a motor-haunted



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street to get there—all alone, and utterly refuses to act as Lucille believes a lady of her reverend age should do. So occasional little tiffs relieve the monotony of their days. Just now indeed Lucille is suffering from a violent attack of influenza and her recovery is much retarded by frantic jealousy of the blooming young housemaid who has been promoted to wait on “her lady” and whose humble ministrations and submissive ways are obviously very welcome to Mme. la Comtesse.

“I am afraid Lucille is growing bad-tempered,” the latter confided to me, “and you know, I do like to see smiling faces round me. It is a great pity that the lower classes seem to sour so with age!”

At that moment Filomena appeared with the tea-tray, and I could not help exclaiming at the beauty of her waving golden hair as a stray gleam of sunshine shot in and rested upon it.

“Tell her you admire it,” whispered Madame; “it will cheer her up! I always believe in making people pleased with themselves.”

We discussed our tea solemnly and the talk veered, naturally, to things in France, where just now our dearest interests are at stake. And Madame began to tell me of the many happy years she had spent in a château near Argenton, probably riddled with shells now. Suddenly she jumped up and ran off to find a picture of the place to show me, an old photograph in an equally old album.

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“That is it,” she said. “These were my rooms, in the right wing, and there in the big tower in the centre is *la chambre de la Fée* the Fairy’s bower—which my little boy used as a playroom. I seem to see his toys on the floor there still!”

Her blue eyes grew dim, and I hastened to chase sad recollections by asking for the Fairy’s story. I scented a new legend!

“It is not a legend at all,” my friend said as if answering my thoughts. “It is all so circumstantial—something very extraordinary certainly happened there in recent times, so to speak. The tower was only built in 1650, and on the top, on the very edge of the stone parapet is the print of the most beautiful little foot you ever saw! I have put my finger into it hundreds of times! Whose? Well, I will tell you the story as it is told there. Long ago the château stood in the heart of a great forest, and the Marquis de Rânes, the owner, was passionately fond of hunting there alone. He was young and rich and handsome, and, I think, very fastidious, for though it was some years since he had attained his majority he had not yet found a woman whom he cared to make his wife.

“So he rode alone, day after day, through the great forest, dreaming of the bride he desired and wondering whether he should ever find her. And one warm summer evening he had ridden far through the green glades and found that he was growing very thirsty. He had

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not been in that part of his domain of late years, but it seemed to him that he remembered seeing a fountain in it somewhere, so he let his horse who was thirsty too, go where it would, sure that it would carry him to fresh water at last. And after a very little while the wise horse brought him out into a green hollow in the woods where a clear spring bubbled from the rock into a great stone basin. And the Marquis forgot his thirst, for sitting on the edge of the basin was the loveliest girl in the world, fair as a snowdrop just sprung from its sheath, with eyes like stars, and long golden hair which she was combing so that it fell round her in clouds, just like spun glass shining in the sun. She threw it back and looked up at the young man, and his heart gave one big leap and became hers on the spot.

“But he did not tell her so, then. Very delicately and respectfully he saluted her, his hand on his heart and his feathered hat swept low. Then he sprang from his horse and came closer, while the good steed, who probably knew all about her already—since horses know many things that are hidden from us—cropped the fine short grass and dipped his nose in the fountain, and listened with much amusement to his master’s polite little speeches about the weather, for the openings of a conversation in those days were very much the same as they are now. The young lady responded prettily and demurely, and her voice was of such silver sweetness as the Marquis de Rânes

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had never thought to hear. And the words they said to one another meant nothing, but his eyes told what was in his heart, and hers answered with smiling malice, as much as to say, 'That is quite understood, my dear young gentleman, and really you are behaving extremely well!'

"At last the lovely stranger dismissed her interlocutor—actually dismissed the high and mighty Lord of Rânes on his own land!—and he had to ride away in the dusk, looking back again and again as he went, to see the ethereal maiden still sitting like a foam fleck by the fountain combing her shadowy golden hair.

"The next day, and the next, and many a day after, found him again at the spring, so that the path to it was all trodden down like a green ribbon winding between the trees, and always the lovely lady was waiting for him, and at last, when the summer had vanished, and the autumn wind was singing its first rough little song overhead, the Marquis plucked up courage to ask her to be his wife.

"At that all the mirth went out of her eyes; and she looked at him earnestly for a minute, and when she spoke her voice seemed to come from far away.

"'I will marry you on one condition,' she said, 'and that is that you promise never to speak of Death in my hearing. In the moment that you break that promise I shall have to leave you!'

"Ah, the easy promise! The Marquis laughed so

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light-heartedly as he gave it, 'Never, my beloved,' he vowed, 'shall you hear that ugly word from me!'

"So they were married. And lived happily—ever after? Well, no, that is not quite the right ending. Happy they were indeed, for they loved each other dearly, and the golden-haired Marquise was the sweetest of wives and in time became the mother of two children, a boy and a girl, as gay and beautiful as herself. The Marquis was so afraid of losing her that the fatal word she must not hear was never pronounced in the château or even near it, and at last they all forgot that there was such a thing as death in the world.

"And then, one day, some men friends came to hunt with Monsieur de Rânes. They were out in the forest from early morning till sundown, and returned to the house as hungry as hunters proverbially are. Supper was ready in the great hall, the steam of the dishes and the sparkle of the wine whetted still further the appetite of the guests; but the Marquise had not come down from her bower and politeness forbade that the meal should begin without the lady of the house. Hungry himself and annoyed that his friends should be kept waiting, the Marquis strode off fuming to the foot of the stairs and called angrily, 'Are you not ready yet, Madame! One would think that you were *dead!*'

"A piercing shriek answered him—and then he remembered! Up the stairs he rushed, four at a time, calling,



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praying, beseeching forgiveness. But at each turn of the steep spiral he saw her flying feet and fluttering skirts sweeping on above, up, up, to the very top of the high tower. And as he reached the summit and flung himself forward to catch her, his Fairy wife leapt over the parapet and sprang off into space. There was a cloud of golden hair on the wind, a fleck of white against the sky; then she vanished, and the only trace of her flight were two deep little prints in the stone—one of a tiny bare foot firmly planted, the other of just the point of the toes on the outer edge.

“She was gone forever. The Marquis never saw her again, and he mourned her all his life, all the more bitterly that he had lost her through his own fault. But to this day ‘La Fée’ as they call her, sometimes flits up the winding stair, a lovely sad-eyed wraith, and her little foot-prints on the parapet are as clear as if they had just been cut with a chisel. I have put my fingers into them hundreds of times!”

The gleam of sunset had long been quenched in dusk, and the twilight room seemed full of nameless and alluring presences. Was it only a fairy tale?

That evening a story of another kind was told to me. “The Signorino Ireneo wishes to see the Signora,” my

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maid announced, and on my replying "*Favorisca*" (our pretty Roman equivalent for "Show him in"), the young sculptor, who always seems in a tremendous hurry, burst into my studio like a *tramontana* gale. I know his ways and did not rise from the deep chair where most of my time is passed, with my "palimpsest" as I call it, on my knee, the writing pad that I have used for twenty years and which still bears notes of the outrageously sensational stuff I composed in my literary salad days.

At first Ireneo refused even to sit down, and leaning low on the table fixed his keen grey eyes on my face and catechised me like an inquisitor for ten minutes anent some business matters of a friend in whom we are both deeply interested. There was a word in fashion a few years ago which exactly describes this unusual young Roman—he is "intense." Whatever is happening at the moment is the most important thing in life, and as he has all the Italian command of language and eloquence of gesture it is a joy to watch a dozen emotions chase each other across his handsome face within the space of five minutes. It took ten for him to unburden himself of business that evening and then, perceiving an inviting chair not too far off, he sank down into it with a comfortable sigh and gave me a chance to speak of what was in my mind all the time.

"You look tired to death," I said; "is it true that you have been out to Avezzano?"



CASTLE OF AVEZZANO BEFORE THE EARTHQUAKE OF JANUARY, 1915.  
THE SHOCK DESTROYED MOST OF THE UPPER PART



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“Good Heavens!” he cried. “True? I wish it were *not!* If I live to be a hundred I shall still see—and hear—what I have been seeing and hearing for the last eight days. I did not know the world could contain anything so awful!”

Down went his head in his hands as if to shut out the horrible pictures; but the next moment he was looking up again and talking rapidly.

“Figure to yourself, dear lady, that I was working with Ximenes in the studio when we got the news, early in the morning on the 14th. I had already forgotten the fright the earthquake gave us all the day before. Some one rushed in and said, ‘Have you heard? Avezzano is wiped out—destroyed—and scores of other towns too! There are thousands of people, buried under the ruins! and the survivors have nothing to eat and are getting frozen to death!’

“In half-an-hour—I don’t think it could have been more—Ximenes and I and four other men and a girl had packed an automobile with all the food and medicines and blankets it could carry, and I don’t know how we squeezed into it ourselves. One of the chaps was a doctor. We thought to reach Avezzano in a few hours—but the blessed machine broke down four times on the way, and the roads were in an awful condition, so that it was the next day but one—*forty hours later*—that we crested the hill and slid down into that valley of death!



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The railway line was all broken up, so we had skirted round to the further side. I thought I knew the place, but when I looked down at it from the rise it appeared to be one flat expanse of rubble. The impression was terrible. As we slowed up, a great mob of blood-stained cripples with ghastly faces and staring eyes hurled themselves upon the car, shrieking, 'Bread, bread, give us bread!' They were so crazy with hunger that they seemed unconscious of their wounds all blackening with the cold.

"We tossed out provisions and they threw themselves upon the stuff like wild beasts and let us pass on on foot, for we had come with another object besides that of bringing help to the poor creatures—we wanted to rescue a family of our friends who were living in the town when the catastrophe happened. It was for this that the girl had come with us. She was their servant, and entreated us to take her, saying that she could find the house and we could not. She was broken-hearted, poor thing, but there had already been some wonderful rescues, and both she and we hoped we should be in time to save the Matteis. She kept her head wonderfully, and did finally locate the house, or rather the spot where it had stood. *I* was sick with horror by the time we got there, for we had to pick our way carefully not to step on the corpses with which the whole ground was strewn. When the girl halted and said, 'This is it! Dig!' the task looked per-

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fectly hopeless. The building and those next to it had not only fallen but *crumbled*, so that the largest fragments were scarcely the size of a man's hand. What chance for human life when stone and wood had been ground to powder? First we called, going over it all carefully and shouting close to the surface, then putting our heads down to hear if any answer came. No—all was dead silence, and we set to work to dig down into it as hard as we could. The girl suddenly screamed to us to stop. She was crouching on a mound of rubbish farther on, and she had heard some one answer faintly—but she had heard it. In a minute we were working like demons to clear the spot, but we had to be careful too lest we should loosen some mass too suddenly and complete the destruction of whoever was below, protected by some beam or angle.

“When we had got a little way down we called again and heard the answer clearly, but as if very, very far away. I had no idea that a voice from underground could sound so ghostly. ‘Are you the Avvocato Mattei?’ I shouted.

“‘No, I am not. Mattei is in Rome, asleep; do not wake him.’

“We stared at one another. Some poor creature had gone crazy down there in the dark!

“‘Are you in pain? Have you been hurt?’ we asked.

“‘No, of course not! Why should you ask that? I am perfectly comfortable.’

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“‘That is not my master’s voice,’ said the maid, collapsing and bursting into tears, ‘Oh, my dear kind padroni, I am afraid they are all dead!’

“‘We worked on feverishly—that hope of saving a life is an extraordinary emotion—you feel as if you could move the world alone just to succeed in it. From time to time we spoke to the buried one, and as we got the stuff away from above him his voice came more loudly. Suddenly he called to us to stop hammering. ‘I want to read a postcard,’ he said, ‘and you are making such a noise!’

“‘A postcard! How did you get it?’ we asked.

“‘Oh, this man has just brought it. A huge great man—he is standing here beside me. Let me read it in peace.’

“‘We held off for a minute to humour him and then from that pit came a wail of pain.

“‘My head, oh, my head! How it hurts!’ Another cry, a moan, and then silence. It was all over. We got the poor fellow out not long afterwards. He was stone dead, and a stranger to us all.

“‘That night we camped in the station, the only place with a roof on it, but I had come away in my linen modelling blouse and trousers, with only a light overcoat, and I nearly died of the cold. As there was no light anywhere, the rescue work had to stop till dawn. Then a friend gave me a lift in his automobile and I came back to Rome to get some warm clothes and fetch more provisions. We did the distance in record time—four hours without a

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single check! The next day I was back in Avezzano and had got some of the soldiers to come and help to dig at the Mattei house. We had to dig through *seven metres* of rubble, before we found our friends—all dead, father and mother, sons and daughters. The only comfort we had was that we could bury them decently. The pounding character of the earthquake was the strangest thing about it all. Not a trace of furniture did we find, not one scrap of the many books poor Mattei had in his law office. Everything was ground to uniform powder—and the condition of those poor bodies was something I shall never forget!”

He shuddered and passed his hand over his eyes as if to drive away the remembered sight.

“You poor boy!” I exclaimed. “You look thoroughly done up. How long did you stay in that dreadful place?”

“Eight solid days—the most awful days of my whole life,” he replied, “and do you know—I am ashamed to confess it—but what personally upset me most was my own filthy condition! There was scarcely any water—hardly enough to drink—and not a drop could be spared for washing. Can you imagine what it meant to be working all day among the wounded—and the dead—to be scratching round in the rubble—never to get one’s clothes off—to try and eat with one’s hands in that state? I never tasted anything till the evening when I got back to the station—but one had to leave that pretty soon and take

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turns round big fires in the open, with loaded revolvers to keep off the famished wolves who came down to devour the unburied corpses. It takes a lot of time to bury nine or ten thousand dead—there were thousands more under the ruins, for though the soldiers behaved splendidly, like real heroes, when they did come, they were not sent at once, and then in nothing like sufficient numbers. The Government did not take in the extent of the disaster for several days. At last the snow came down—such snow! And I gave it up and came home yesterday. One has one's work to attend to after all!"

Ireneo's graphic story was only the crown and corollary of all I had heard and seen during the ten days preceding his visit. The *terremoto* had filled all minds, made work for all hands, ever since that dreadful moment on the morning of the 13th, when the—to me, familiar—horror made me spring shrieking from my bed. Too well I knew what the first rumble and upheaval meant! One does not live for years in South America and Japan without learning to recognise the terrifying symptoms. The shock was sharp, and (in spite of statistics published afterwards, which gave it a duration of only a few seconds) lasted long enough for me to put on my long fur coat, slippers and head-wrap before going to the front door where my own and other people's servants had collected, screaming still and grey-faced with fright. The streets all round were in an uproar, people who had not had time



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to get downstairs threatening to jump from the windows, and those who had reached the street appearing in the strangest and sketchiest of costumes. Many, expecting another shock, refused to return to their houses at all, and that night the Piazza de Venezia and other open spaces were black with campers, in spite of the bitter cold. All day long too, and for days afterwards, the points where damage had occurred attracted crowds who stood gazing up at cracked church towers and riven walls as if expecting them to explain the force that had attacked them. Many points were guarded by cordons of police to prevent accidents to life from the loosened fragments that occasionally rattled down, and I very nearly got myself arrested in the Via della Mercede, where, in my usual impetuous fashion, I had begun to tear along directly past the threatening bell tower of Sant' Andrea delle Fratte. Half a dozen officials gave chase and brought me back, scolding me for my temerity, into the Via dei Due Macelli, whence my little adventure had been watched by the mob with much amusement.

The *scossa* had destroyed the telegraphic communication and the railway lines all round the stricken district of Avezzano, so it was only on the 14th that the first accounts—which we thought must be wildly exaggerated—began to reach Rome. But, after that, every hour brought news that increased our consternation, for it was evident that this was one of the most destructive cataclysms

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that have ever visited our poor Italy. The centre of the disturbance was actually at Avezzano, the diagrams published afterwards by the papers showing a series of concentric rings which took in all that district, while another series of slightly curved lines crossed the entire peninsula, at more or less regular distances, always diagonally from northeast to southwest. The force of the shocks was indicated by numbers, the most violent counting as 10, so that when we saw Rome marked 7 we knew that it had been fairly sharp here and felt less ashamed of the panic which had taken possession of us.

I never can get up much interest in the scientific discussions about these visitations; I have, alas, experienced more of them than I can count now, and in spite of discoveries, assertions, and all the paraphernalia of the seismological observations, I see that no warning is ever given in time to save a single life. It is true that warnings are sent out when the machines get an attack of nerves, but the phenomenon resents such spying and waits till people have forgotten all about it—then it chooses its own time to pounce upon them! I remember one such absurd incident in Japan during the visit of Prince Arthur of Connaught to that country in 1906. A great concert was being given at which the Prince and all the attendant bigwigs were assisting. The hall was crowded with the *fine fleur* of Tokyo official society when the professors at the earthquake observatory sent a frantic message to the For-

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eign Office to the effect that the machines had gone mad—a fearful earthquake was about to take place. The Foreign Office was convulsed with fear lest the royal guest should be swallowed up in it, and various officials raced hotfoot to the concert hall to get him out. But panic must be avoided—and less important lives must take their chance. So a velvet-footed gentleman stepped up to Sir Claude MacDonald and whispered something in his ear. The Ambassador, without turning a hair, whispered to his wife, who with a sweet smile said something to the Prince about going out to get a cup of tea. The party rose, formed in proper procession, Lady MacDonald leading the way on the Prince's arm, and with much dignity they moved down the hall and reached the open. The rest of the world waited—waited, wondering at the time that cup of tea was taking! Then somehow the word of fear, "*Ji-shin!*" was whispered. The performers had heard it first and had melted away silently; the public rose like one man when it understood what was in the wind, and in a very few minutes the hall was empty but for two grand pianos and a tangle of overturned chairs.

And nothing happened after all! The earthquake got shy and changed its route. And the professors feeling dreadfully sold, poor dears, declared that *they* had never sent the message, and that the whole thing was somebody's very bad practical joke!

The larger cities of Italy have been infested this year

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by a big and very clever organisation of thieves, who made quite a harvest on the 13th by plundering the houses from which the inhabitants had fled. Encouraged by their success and wishing to repeat it, these ingenious gentlemen circulated a prophecy that there would be a much worse shock on January 25th, but the police, on guard for once, discovered the benevolent motive and disclosed it to the public, so that no houses were left unguarded on the indicated day. There were some alarming robberies, however, chiefly of jewels which nervous women packed into small receptacles and kept at hand day and night in case of sudden flight. A foreign diplomatist's wife put her little box on the sofa near the door of the bedroom every night, locking the door itself very carefully. One sad morning she rose, saw the box just where she had placed it before going to bed, and opened it to take out her rings. It was quite empty—and the bedroom door was still locked, though the auxiliary bolts were found to have been drawn. That thief was qualified to figure in a Sherlock Holmes drama! He was caught though, a few days later, in Milan, with the goods and a great quantity of other property in notes and jewels and bonds, which he had not had time to put in safety. The Italian police in the north are pretty bright. Further south from here people suspect it of occasional understandings with Camorra, but our own few experiences in that direction have been quite satisfactory ones. The



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chameleon-like organisation, whatever its crimes, never forgets a benefit. My brother Marion had once or twice incidentally shown kindness to some members of it, and when any article of value disappeared from the Villa at Sorrento (where the doors were always open and a bewildering display of silver shone all round the dining-room walls) it was instantly brought back with profound apologies for the "mistake." Apologies which he accepted gravely without asking any inconvenient questions.

To return to actualities, I ought to say that long before the Signorino Ireneo gave me that account of his experiences we had had plenty of ocular testimony in Rome of the results of the disaster in the Abruzzi. From the evening of the 16th trains and autos brought so many wounded into the town that every hospital was crowded to overflowing and some new one had to be installed temporarily every day. Many of the poor victims died on the way, in spite of first aid rendered on the spot by the Red Cross and numbers of volunteers. The hospitals were naturally, fearfully shorthanded, and then the good people of Rome, from the first to the last, came forward in thousands to serve as nurses and helpers. And they did it *well*, fashionable women who had never waited on themselves in their lives taking over all the most repulsive details of nursing work, and sticking to it, day after day, while wage-earners sacrificed many a day's pay to give



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their services where they were so desperately needed. Our mountain peasants are clean in their habits compared to those of many other countries, but when it comes to preparing for operations the process of preparatory disinfection is a very arduous one, and was made more so by the fact that many of the poor creatures had lain for days under some protecting beam or table in an atmosphere of powdered rubbish and burst drains. Princess —, one of the loveliest of our young women, said, "I was given a *contadina* very badly hurt to prepare for an operation. The doctor said, 'She must be *perfectly* clean, otherwise I will not answer for the results.' Well—it took me hours, and before I had done with her, what do you think? I had to take the whole skin off the soles of her feet!"

Besides the wounded and far more numerous than they, were the refugees, brought in trains, autos and carts, anything that would carry them from famine and snow and desolation to where they could be sheltered and fed. Numbers were received by the charitable into their houses; the children were handed over to all the convents until there was actually not room to make up another little bed; Queen Margaret, ever the first to help in trouble, turned a great part of her palace into an asylum, both for the wounded and the homeless, and I don't know how many times a day the ambulances with the ghastly loads passed my front door on the way thither. As for

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the King and Queen, they did everything possible to meet the emergency—even as every one knew they would, for the King is the true son of his father, who received at the same moment the news of the outbreak of cholera in Naples and the request to attend a great function in Tuscany. Holding the letter in one hand and the telegram in the other, he looked at both, then he said to his aide-de-camp, "At Pardenone they make *fiesta*—in Naples they die. We go to Naples." The words are engraved on the pedestal of his statue in Naples.

The Knights of Malta took a whole hotel and turned it in twenty hours into an asylum for the poor nursing mothers and their tribes of children. It was pathetic to see the women coming along, pale still with fear and hunger, the last-born in their arms and swarms of half-naked, weeping children clinging to their skirts. All were received and comforted and cared for. At the station, committees of reception were on duty night and day, to feed and clothe the refugees and draft them off to the different shelters. One hideous danger had to be met at once—the devils who run the white slave trade were all alert for their prey. So the Marchesa Maddalena Patrizi, who looks after the welfare of between five and six thousand working girls here all the year round, instituted a separate hall and committee for the reception and distribution of the young girls, and the police kept a vigilant watch on the "suspects" so that it is hoped that

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few fell into their hands. But who can say? They rushed out to Avezzano at the very first news of the catastrophe, and represented themselves as helpers, giving away food and clothing, and those who were not detected are doubtless responsible for various poor children of whom no trace has yet been found and who were known not to have been buried in the ruins.

One of the most pathetic things has been the inevitable breaking up of families by the very charity which rescued them from famine and death by freezing. Scattered by fear or circumstance when the shock came, too terrified to speak, in some cases, afterwards, they were picked up as they stood, brought to Rome, and housed wherever it was possible, only learning days and days afterwards whether their relatives were lost or saved. This has been one of the tasks undertaken by kind people—to find out those who had been rescued and put them in communication with one another. Still now (I write this six months later) the newspapers publish inquiries after missing friends, relatives, children—and one is so glad to see that they are sometimes promptly answered.

In one case a poor man, who was brought to a hospital here, with both legs smashed, told the doctors that his wife and five children had been killed—but that there was a wee baby, seventeen days old, who had been dug out alive at the same time as himself, “She is all I have left!” he wailed. “Oh, good Signori, find her for me!

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Somebody picked her up—she lives—*please* find her for me.”

“But, my good man, there were scores of tiny babies saved! How are we to know which is yours? They all look alike at that age—you would hardly know her yourself!”

“No, I should not,” he replied sadly.

“Is there no kind of sign or mark by which you could recognise her?”

“Wait a minute,” said the anxious parent, “I remember something now. When the *matrona* pierced my child’s ears she put in a pair of earrings that my wife had—” and he described a rather peculiar pair of the tiny ornaments which every girl baby begins to wear when she is a few days old.

Some kind ladies undertook to find the infant who was wearing those earrings. It took several days—there were so many babies in all the different refuges! It was in the very last, when they had all but given up hope, that she was finally tracked down. The searchers took an earring to show the man who still lay helpless in the hospital. “That is it! You have found her!” he cried, weeping for joy.

The proportionately great number of children rescued alive from under the ruins was surprising; children and very old people survived where all the stronger members of the family were destroyed. One of the reporters said



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that it was perfectly wonderful to see ten, twenty, thirty little creatures dug out in a day, smiling and rosy little flowers freshly sprung from that seared and ravaged soil. It is said that their little bodies had found protection in corners and under furniture where grown ups would have perished, but no theory has been advanced to account for the large proportion of very old people who also survived. Some of the rescues seem almost incredible. One poor woman brought a child into the world in some dark angle of safety deep under ground. She was all alone, but she had done what was necessary for the baby and had kept it warm with her own body. Her calls were heard, and when an opening had been made through which she could speak, she told the diggers about the baby. Very carefully the hole was enlarged (there was always the danger that a touch of the pick might loosen some mass and crush the last spark of life out of those poor buried-alive people), but the woman was very unwilling to give up the baby to the hands that were reaching down for it. "It is naked!" she protested. "I can't let you take it!" At last, assuring her that they had coverings at hand for the poor mite, they got it away from her, and after another hour and a half got the woman herself out—neither she nor her child had a scratch and the mother seemed very little the worse for that awful experience.

One little girl of six or thereabouts had an almost more terrible one. She found herself in the cellar, with all her



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family lying dead around her, only she and a fierce great pig left alone to keep each other company. The mountain pig is very much wild boar and often attacks the children in the villages. This one, not content with the dead, wanted to eat the living child, and that little thing had the presence of mind to beat him on the snout with a stone every time he came at her—and the fight lasted forty-eight hours.

The heavy snow came down and practically stopped the rescue work a few days after the catastrophe. What it added to the sufferings of the living out in the open no words can describe. The motors could not get through it to bring more provisions or tents, and many died from exposure, and also from lockjaw as the consequence of their injuries. Avezzano was a pretty and flourishing city, very well known, but there were literally *scores* of those little mountain towns, forgotten and unknown, places that even in summer can only be approached on foot, where no help came for a fortnight or more. The soldiers were perfectly heroic, working night and day, facing constant danger from the crumbling ruins, giving away their last ration to the sufferers and threatening mutiny when their officers held them back from digging into ruins where one touch would have buried them all under masses of loosened masonry. One man got a little boy of five out from somewhere—naked and crying for food. The rescuer got hold of a pair of military trousers for

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him, put his own cloak over his shoulders, and after feeding him gave him a rifle and told him to scare away the dogs who came to devour the dead. It was a strange game for a little boy, but that child was the proudest little boy in Italy that day! He never moved from the spot—indeed, he could not walk a step in the huge baggy trousers, and he solemnly explained to all who passed by what his duties were.

The most incredible case of all was that of a man who was discovered to be alive underground *twenty-five days* after the earthquake! He made himself heard, after many fruitless efforts, and when a sufficiently large opening had been made he scrambled up from the pit without assistance and stood firmly on his feet. His first cry when the daylight shone down into that living grave was one of frantic joy. "Light! light! God be praised! I thought I had gone blind!"

He said that he had been able to move about a little in his cavity and had found that the rain, or the melting snow, was dribbling down on one side of it. With his hands he scooped out the earth below, so that the water gathered as in a cup, and he had drunk a very little at intervals from the tiny store. He seemed perfectly well and insisted on walking unassisted to one of the tents, only asking sadly after his family. The kind soldiers swore that they were all saved, but he looked in their faces and understood. He was the only one left.

## Chapter Fifteen

### PICTURES AND PLACES

**A** FEW years ago, when we were living in the Methow, there appeared on our horizon a genial citizen of the world we had left behind. It was on an October afternoon, I remember, one of those autumn days that pay for all the winter frosts and summer scorchings; when our world of mountain and valley, river and pine forest, seemed to be lying back in a wash of brown and purple and gold, its harvests all reaped, its fruits stored, resting after its rich labours of production, dreaming wide-eyed before its winter sleep, even as after a hard day's work a man will sit and dream in front of the fire ere the night comes down. Our new acquaintance sat on the porch, giving us the last news of the live places on the far side of the Rockies, till the twilight had chilled the gold to grey, and the grey in its turn became silver under the light of the Hunter's Moon that rolled up huge and round from behind the shoulder of the hill. He had been taking us far afield, telling us of his queer experiences in Germany and Russia, which countries he had visited without knowing a single word of the language, nor, so far as Russia was concerned, even the name of a town

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except Moscow. For this he headed erratically, getting out of the train and stopping for the night at any station that took his fancy. At such places he expressed all his wants by sketching the objects on paper—a bed, a bottle of wine, two eggs, a loaf of bread, and so on; and finally, strange to say he actually did reach Moscow. The American "*flair*" for a luxurious hotel landed him in a very smart one where the password could be given in French, much to his relief. After a day or two, during which he fell in love (he called it making acquaintance) with a charmingly pretty typewriter girl who spoke English, it struck him that he would like to take an evening walk and see how the historic place looked by moonlight. As he passed the hall porter the man addressed a remark to him—in Russian. Mr. W——, thinking that it most likely had to do with the weather, nodded airily and replied, "Yes, a very fine night!"

Then he sped away, down one street, up another—and became aware that a couple of policemen were pounding on his tracks. His conscience being perfectly at rest, he turned round and smiled on them—and ten minutes later found himself locked up for the night in a cell in jail. He had been too surprised even to protest! With morning light he bribed his keepers to take a note to the typewriter girl, the only person he could think of as a rescuer, and she, in fits of laughter, explained that no one was allowed to walk about in the evening, the city being just then un-



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der martial law. When she had persuaded the authorities that Mr. W—— was neither a nihilist nor a spy, they let him go, and she accompanied him back to his hotel where the porter, by her kind help, informed the rash man that he had told him the night before that the city was under martial law and had been amazed at the gentleman's complete disregard of the warning.

The little experience was not taken much to heart, for Mr. W—— got "run in" several times on unexplained counts; once, in Berlin, he was arrested for whistling an opera air in the street at night! The policeman made him understand at least that whistling, after ten o'clock, came almost under the head of *Lèse-Majesté*, as the Kaiser would not allow his faithful subjects to be disturbed in their beauty-sleep! (The gentle darling!).

Well, Mr. W—— carried us far into the night with his quaint stories, and when he rose to go and we thanked him for his delightful company, he said, "Oh, but it is a joy to talk to people like you—you seemed to *see* what I was trying to describe. You seem to have the great gift of visualisation!"

Here was a grand new word! It had "Boston" stamped all over it and was so much finer than "imagination" that I annexed it at once, and have used it on every possible occasion ever since. Apart from the merits of "Boston" and newness, I think it does, more adequately than the old-fashioned term, describe the mental vision, colour and



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form and all, which sometimes breaks over our thoughts with such almost tangible reality that we find ourselves confidently saying, "I *saw* that event," "I could paint that scene precisely as it took place."

Sometimes the picture is so clear, so insistent, that it actually seems to be commissioning one to paint it. This has happened to me lately in connection with three striking tableaux which had for their background the lonely basilica of St. Paul's without the Walls. I have no brush but my pen; the gorgeous and tragic shades could find no Hans Makart to put them on canvas, so they came to me to be put on paper. May they forgive me if I do them scant justice!

The first of these pictures marks the entrance of "Carlo d'Angiò," the first of the Angevin rulers, into Italy, in the year 1266. His personality and his deeds made such an impression on the populations of the South that, to this day, his name is a household word, and there is a belief among the peasants that he is not dead, but waiting, in some mysterious retreat, to return and govern them. So it was believed of Charlemagne, of Barbarossa, so of King Arthur. The elementary instincts of human nature make it incredulous of death where such immortals are in question. But of these popular heroes Charles of Anjou was

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perhaps the least admirable so far as character and principles are concerned; cruel to his enemies, ready to turn on his allies where his personal ambitions were involved, more crafty than sincere in his support of the Church; but all these things have been forgiven him because he ruled his hard-won dominions well and temporarily delivered his subjects from the attacks of the Saracen pirates whose raids had half depopulated the coasts. You will not travel far along the shores of the Southern Sea without seeing one of his great towers frowning out at it, a square black mass on some upstanding rock or promontory, from whose summit Charles' keen-eyed seamen kept watch night and day, and at the first sign of a Saracen sail sent out runners to warn the coast folk of the danger. Then the "mobilisation" was a thing to see! The cattle and goats and horses were driven along at full speed and pushed into the enormous underground space provided for them, dark, but safe, with its own well for water. The provisions for animals and human beings were loaded on the carts together with the women and children, all with their arms full of household goods. The men, on horseback rode beside and behind the convoy, and long ere the black hull approached the shore, all were safe in the huge keep, behind walls twenty feet thick at the base and only pierced with slits whence to fire on the aggressors. But these grew shy of attacking the quick-moving bodies of armed men who patrolled the coast—and also found but small

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satisfaction in burning villages emptied of inhabitants, where they could not capture slaves for the market or find anything left to loot. As for attacking the towers of Carlo d'Angiò, that would never have suggested itself to them. As well attack the Sasso d'Italia or Mount Etna. So the land had peace from the Saracen pest till weaker monarchs ruled it, and our peasants and fisher-folk, who have long memories for benefits received, speak lovingly and proudly of their hero when they lead you over one of his impregnable fortresses. How many I have visited on that fair coast! My brother Marion and I always dreamed of possessing one of them as a strong refuge from the harassing complications of modern life. He realised the dream when he became master of San Nicola in Calabria and I know some of the happiest days of his life were spent in the seagirt castle which he had made into a second home. You will never cure an eagle of the love of rock and sky.

And who was Charles of Anjou? Since history has scarcely a place in the Higher Education with which a polite writer should credit all his readers, a little elucidation on that point will perhaps not be taken amiss. My own education was of the antediluvian kind, and was largely based on history from beginning to end, but so despairingly complicated are the chronicles dealing with the

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conflicts of Guelfs and Ghibellines that, to my humiliation, I must confess that I could not even keep the general tendencies of the two parties in my head until I made the brilliant discovery that "Guelf" and "Pope" were words of one syllable, and that "Emperor" and "Ghibelline" both had three! I use the expression "general tendencies" advisedly, for, although each was constantly striving for supremacy in the councils of Europe, they were at the same time closely interdependent and would coalesce against a common enemy, to part angrily again when the danger was passed. The situation was, throughout, a curious one, for the Emperor's election required the Pope's sanction to make it valid, while the Pope stood in constant need of the Emperor's assistance in order to hold his own against the audacious encroachments of either France or Naples. Needless to say, the latter desired object invariably resulted in the attempt to make imperial influence dominant in the two Sicilies, demonstrating the incontrovertible truth of the axiom that it is better to fight even a powerful neighbour by yourself—taking all the chances—than to call in a terrible ally who only crushes your foe to become your master afterwards.

To put the case roughly; the Swabian House of Hohenstaufen had, after their conquest of Sicily by Frederick II and the annihilation, with frightful barbarity, of its Norman rulers, retained the kingdom in their hands, and governed, on the whole, no worse than their contemporaries;



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but they were a constant menace to the Pope and his dominions. To eradicate this danger Clement IV, who owed his election in great part to Charles of Anjou, the brother of Saint Louis, agreed to bestow the crown upon him—if he could take it, which Charles finally succeeded in doing, through force and treachery combined. But that crown was red with the blood of the noble Swabians who fought for Manfred and his son, and when Charles put to death the innocent generous boy who was the last of his race, he fixed an eternal stain on his name and called down on his posterity a curse which clung to the House of Anjou till its own downfall.

Yet in the chronicles of the time Charles is extolled as a paladin of pure renown, and in Italy, where feudal traditions have eaten so deep into the nature of the people that even in this late twentieth century they are not eradicated, he was received with acclamations wherever he went, both before and after these triumphs. His strange face, "fixed and severe, the nose huge, the features hard," was already familiar to many when he responded to the call of the harried Pope and, leaving the greater part of his army to march down through Italy, took, with the remainder of his followers, the quicker way by sea from Marseilles and was flung on the Italian coast at Porto Pisano, only escaping from Manfred's watchful fleet through the furious storm which had dispersed it at that moment. Nothing daunted, he set sail again, the storm





RUINS OF THE ANCIENT ROMAN GRANARIES AT OSTIA



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still raging, evaded pursuit, and found himself opposite the port of Ostia, with a sea running mountains high and Heaven itself declaring against him in a terrific outburst of thunder and lightning. There was neither pilot nor guide to show the French knights where to land, but Charles sprang into a boat, steered it to the shore himself, and leapt like a conqueror on to the classic soil which was to feel his heavy footprints for many a long year to come.

The news flew to Rome, barely twenty miles away, and the heads of the great Guelf families hurried to meet and greet the man upon whom they looked as a deliverer from their now insupportable neighbours, the Hohenstaufen rulers of the South. They had not grasped the fact that until there are new heavens and a new earth and the sea shall run wide between central and southern Italy, the inhabitants of the wine-tinted lands of the Two Sicilies, whether native or alien, will make "*la pluie et le beau temps*" for Romagna. French Charles was even more ambitious than Swabian Manfred, for, as the sequel showed, he aimed at nothing less than complete dominion over Rome itself.

One great quality for dominion he, in common with other potentates of his day, certainly possessed—the sense of the value of dramatic setting where popular favour was in question. How often such a setting has "made history" let the student of that science say! It is impossible not to admire the expert use made of it by the Angevins in Italy,

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the country of all others which judges by impressions rather than by reflection. Charles of Anjou, the Provençal fighter, as subtle as he was brave, resolved to paint for the Romans a picture of himself which they could never forget.

So he allowed his Guelf supporters to lead him, with great pomp and noisy rejoicings, to the monastery of Saint Paul's without the Walls, where he paused for rest and refreshment until his three galleys had sailed proudly up the Tiber and his thousand Provençal knights, with their numerous following, had rejoined him. Rome had already bestowed on him the Senatorship of the City for ten years to come; the Pope had named him King of Sicily, and although the kingship could exist only in name until he should have expelled Manfred and his son from the throne, Charles at once assumed the dignities and rights of royalty.

We are not told what the Basilian Monks of St. Paul's without the Walls thought of this invasion of their quiet monastery. Its position had often in former ages caused it to be used as a fortress of defence for Rome; at one time a flourishing and martial little city stood on the spot and was kept heavily garrisoned for fear of surprises from the mouth of the Tiber. This city had almost disappeared when Charles and his French knights took up their quarters there for a day or two before the triumphal entry into Rome, and the melancholy which reigns over the region

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now had begun to settle on it already. But the place must have looked gay enough on Whitsun Eve, May 23, 1265, when Charles of Anjou, in all the glory of gilt armour and towering plumes, came clanking across the courtyard in the sun to mount his charger and lead a thousand other shining knights into Rome.

Only one regret made itself felt among these splendid gentlemen; their leader's haste to reach the Eternal City had forced them to embark without their horses, so while the latter were eating their heads off in Marseilles their masters had to cover three dusty miles on foot to the City Gate. We may be sure, however, that none of the grumbling was allowed to come to the leader's ears, even when his procession was met by a stream of knights and nobles on horseback who came out to greet him. While the monks of St. Paul's breathed a sigh of relief at their grand guests' departure, the clergy of Rome as well as thousands of the citizens hastened from the Porta San Paolo to hail the great man and his company, and he was so elated at their welcome that, after alighting at St. Peter's, he proceeded to the Lateran Palace and installed himself there without so much as asking leave of its owner, the Pope.

Clement, who was expecting to find in the Count of Anjou a submissive and deferential vassal, was so enraged at this insolence that he wrote his protégé a stinging letter, ordering him to find other quarters forthwith. The archives contain no trace of a written apology from the



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truculent Frenchman, but he perceived his mistake and at once removed himself and his newly constituted court to a palace on the Coelian Hill, whence, after his public investiture with the Senatorship on June 21, he issued many pompous decrees, as well as coins marked with his effigy, and in every way showed that henceforth he intended to be the real Governor of Rome. At every new encroachment the watchful Pope called him to order; finally, when Charles pleaded that he was only doing as former "Senators" had done, Clement drily replied that "he had *not* summoned him to emulate the evil deeds of his predecessors and to usurp the rights of the Church."

There let us leave them; the long, long quarrels, the mutual suspicions, the fast-growing power of the Angevins in Italy, the good that came to the South through their firm and valiant rule—these are all told in the great histories and cannot be touched on here. My other two pictures of St. Paul's without the Walls belong to their closing chapter; one a burst of sunshine—one dark as a starless night.

One hundred and forty-three years after Charles of Anjou rode into Rome from St. Paul's without the Walls, his descendant, Ladislaus of Naples, in all the splendour of youth and success, chose the same starting-point from

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which to make his own triumphal entry into the capital of the world. But Ladislaus came as a conqueror to take possession of an almost vanquished city, from which Pope Gregory XII had fled in terror of his own general, the great *condottiere*, Paul Orsini, who, having been trusted with the defence of Rome against the Neapolitan Assailants, was bent on subjugating it for himself—after the manner of *Condottieri* since the world began. But he found it impossible to complete that task in the face of the great forces which Ladislaus brought against him, and, after beheading several of his private enemies and forcing the Colonnas to buy their lives at an enormous sum, he abandoned the lost cause of the absent Pope and calmly took service for Naples. He had the grace to retire to the fortress of Valca, six miles distant, on the day of the conqueror's triumphant entry, but that was the only sign of shame or compunction which is recorded in connection with a transaction so common among leaders of fighting men in those times that it excited neither surprise nor comment.

Ladislaus was a little child when his father, Charles of Durazzo (the second of that name), was stabbed and then poisoned in Hungary, whither he had gone on a raid for the throne, his claim based on his cousinship to Joanna, of sinister fame, who had married the heir to that throne and afterwards connived at his murder. Things looked very dark for the raider's widow Margaret, down there

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in Naples, when she received the news of her husband's tragic end. Queen Joanna's fourth and last husband, Otto of Brunswick, had espoused the cause of the little French heir, Louis, the direct descendant of the first Angevin Kings of Naples. Otto took possession of the city for him on July 20, 1387, and Margaret, with her two young children, Ladislaus and Joanna, fled to Gaeta and shut herself up with them in that impregnable fortress, always the last refuge of hunted Neapolitan royalties.

There they seem to have remained for close on three years during which time the brother and sister grew strong and beautiful, and, under their mother's teaching, became imbued with the ambitions and resentments which were then the natural heritage of great families. In 1389, the reigning Pope, Urban VI, died, and a successor was chosen in the person of a Neapolitan, Cardinal Pietro Tomacelli, who took the name of Boniface IX. He was one of the youngest Popes ever elected, being only thirty years of age, a man (according to the protestant historian, Gregorovius), of "strong will, mature judgment and blameless life." He at once decided to follow the more ancient Papal policy of close alliance with the powerful southern kingdom, and, as a safeguard against French encroachments, restored the Durazzo succession there, causing the boy Ladislaus to be crowned by his Legate, in Naples, in May, 1390. In 1407, when more than one Pope had passed away, the young King, forgetting that he



PANORAMA VIEW OF NAPLES AS SEEN FROM THE VILLA PATRIZI





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owed his restoration to the Holy See, marched against Rome as an enemy and entered it as a conqueror.

Not for him the modest following of a thousand knights on foot with which his ancestor, Charles of Anjou, had been satisfied! The traditions of that first triumph, handed down from generation to generation among the silent, dark-robed monks of St. Paul's without the Walls, paled and vanished forever before the torrent of audacity and splendour which swept over the monastery now. Ladislaus remained there for five days in order to complete the arrangements for his triumph and to give the Romans time to prepare a fitting reception for him. They had been bitterly angered by the fact that Paolo Orsini had, in return for much gold received from Ladislaus, made over the city to him without their permission. The Roman Republic, so long dead, still existed as a magnificent phantom in men's minds, and although the *Senatus Populusque Romanus* usually wielded their authority to sell its rights to the highest bidder, they were jealous to have their shadowy power acknowledged publicly. So, pretending to ignore the fact of Orsini's bargain with the King, the chosen representatives of the "sovereign people" hastened to Ladislaus where he tarried in the monastery, and with much pompous but soul-satisfying make-believe, concluded a treaty with him by which the entire government was given over into his hands. The witty Neapolitan must have had some difficulty in repressing his

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amusement at the transaction, but he evidently felt that it was necessary to humour such heady and fickle folk, especially as, though the Capital and other fortresses were made over to him, the Pope's adherents still held the Castle of Sant' Angelo, and until that was reduced he could not be sure that the populace, in one of its thousand whims, would not turn against himself and declare for the Pontiff.

The kiss of spring lay on all the land, and the empty country between St. Paul's and the city gates was veiled in the delicate pink and white haze of almond and cherry blossoms, little showers of petals blowing over the hedges to float down on the shining helmets and jewelled armour of the young King and his knights. The canes on either side of the long straight road were rustling their pale pointed leaves in the breeze from the sea, and the vineyards, where the brown stocky vines had only just been set after the winter's sleep, were mapped into paths by fresh woven fences of golden-coloured *cannuccie* over which the Roman "monthly" roses clustered and climbed and flung their long wreaths of pink blooms up against the blue Roman sky. Over forty, fifty miles of Campagna the wild flowers, newly sprung, swayed and bowed in the wind and filled the air with sweetness, and the tinkle of the sheep-bells and the bleating of young lambs made a soft undertone to the outbursts of martial music and the answering songs of triumph when, on the 25th of April

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the great procession set forth from the monastery of St. Paul's without the Walls.

Eight Roman barons upheld the gold-embroidered canopy under which King Ladislaus rode, arrayed in his most magnificent armour and wearing a mantle of cloth-of-gold embroidered with the audacious motto, "Aut Cæsar aut nihil." His troops followed in brilliant order, for this was a conquest which had scarcely cost a blow. The Romans in great crowds, accompanied them, bearing palm branches and torches; the streets of the city were strewn with flowers and the houses hung with brightly coloured tapestries, while everywhere were songs of rejoicing and much shouting of welcome to the new ruler, whose only recommendation, besides his youth and good looks, seems to have been his newness, which inspired the hope that for a time at least the Romans might live in peace and order instead of under the tyranny of their quarrelsome and cruel nobles. When night fell the bells pealed for hours, and a thousand bonfires painted sheets of red against the soft spring sky. Prophetic glow! Just five years later Ladislaus besieged and took Rome in earnest; in June, 1413, the flames of burning houses replaced the joy-fires with which the fickle city had welcomed him in April, 1405. The horrors of that sacking are remembered there still. Nothing was sacred to the Neapolitan robbers, and Ladislaus in his arrogance and

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fury, stabled his horses in St. Peter's over the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles.

There, after committing every outrage against humanity and religion that it was possible to devise, he distributed great quantities of corn to the starving populace—and once more, this time amid the ruins of their homes and the piled corpses of their murdered fellow-citizens, the Romans organised processions and festivals in his honour, and all whom he had left alive shouted, "Long live King Ladislaus!"

The wish was not fulfilled. Nine months later he indeed entered Rome again, on his way to Tuscany to continue the never-ending struggle against the Pope and the Emperor Sigismund who had declared for the rightful cause. This time he chose to enter by the Lateran Gate; blinded with pride, and followed by all his knights, also, on horseback, he rode into the "Mother Church of Christendom," and obliged the Canons to bring out their most sacred relics, the heads of the Apostles, for his inspection as he sat in the saddle, while the whole beautiful building rang with the jingle of harness, and the marble pavement was pawed and broken by the hoofs of his followers' steeds.

It seems as if this last insult called down his doom, for now comes the dark picture that closes the series. Ladislaus' expedition failed. He returned, broken and ill, a few months later, the only fruit of his campaign consisting



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in a little troop of nobles (among them his first helper, Paolo Orsini) dragged along in chains to be executed as soon as he reached his own territory of Naples. But he was already dying, himself, and the nature of his disease, brought on by excesses of every description (and rendered more violent, as was suspected, by poisoning of a most diabolical kind) rendered him an object of such loathing that none of his followers would approach him. Four peasants were captured and forced to carry his litter over the last stages through the Roman domains which he had coveted so furiously. All through the night they swung along, and in silence and darkness brought him to the monastery of St. Paul's without the Walls. What bitter memories of his triumphs in the gay spring days of 1408 must have assailed him as he lay there, while some one hurried down to Ostia to find a ship to carry him to Naples! On August 6, a few days later, in agony of mind and body, he died, in the dark fortress of Castel Nuovo, childless, despised, unmourned, and his crown passed to his sister, Joanna the Second, who, mindful perhaps of the old childish days in Gaeta, announced his demise very decently, saying, "To our grief that noble prince has passed away from this life."

Naples the beautiful has not been fortunate in its sovereigns! Few have there been who have not left execrable memories behind them. I am afraid their chronicles are more fitted to point a moral than adorn a tale. Yet the



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wonderful city basks on in sunshine and loveliness; earthquakes spare it, volcanic eruptions reach it not. Every time I see it, it appears more transcendently perfect; even its dark fortresses seem to have silenced their terrible secrets at last, and their black cyclopean masses only serve to accentuate the matchless brilliance of this Empress of the South where she lies on the jewelled shore between the calm blue heaven above and the bluer sea below. She has brought forth many great sinners, but many, too, are the Saints who have trodden her streets; may they pray her some day into holiness and peace!

THE END



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