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A DECADE OF ITALIAN WOMEN.

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VICTORIA COLONNA

Portrait of Victoria Colonna, Queen of Sicily and Naples, by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, 1700.

A DECADE

OF

ITALIAN WOMEN.

BY

T. ADOLPHUS TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF "THE GIRLHOOD OF CATHERINE DE' MEDICI."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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1859. S. C. F.

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PREFACE.

THE degree in which any social system has succeeded in ascertaining woman's proper position, and in putting her into it, will be a very accurate test of the progress it has made in civilisation. And the very general and growing conviction, that our own social arrangements, as they exist at present, have not attained any satisfactory measure of success in this respect, would seem, therefore, to indicate, that England in her nineteenth century has not yet reached years of discretion after all.

But conscious deficiency is with nations at least, if not always with individuals, the sure precursor of improvement. The path before us towards the ideal in this matter is a very long one; extends, indeed, further than eye can see. What path of progress does not? And our advance upon it will still be a sure concomitant and proof of our advance in all civilisation. But the question of more immediate moment is, admitting that we are moving in this respect, are we moving in the right direction? We have been *moving* for a long time back. Have we missed the right road? Have we unfortunately retrograded instead of progressing?

There are persons who think so. And there are

not wanting, in the great storehouse of history, certain periods, certain individuals, certain manifestations of social life, to which such persons point as countenancing the notion, that better things have been, as regards woman's position and possibilities, than are now. There are, painted on the slides of Mnemosyne's magic lanthorn, certain brilliant and captivating figures, which are apt to lead those who are disgusted with the smoke and reek of the Phoenix-burning going on around them, to suppose that the social conditions which produced such, must have been less far from the true path than our present selves. Nay, more. There have been constellations of such stars, quite sufficiently numerous to justify the conclusion, that the circumstances of the time at which they appeared were in their nature calculated to produce them.

Of such times, the most striking in this respect, as in so many others, is that fascinating dawn time of modern life, that ever wonderful "renaissance" season, when a fresh sap seemed to rush through the tissues of the European social systems, as they passed from their long winter into spring. And in the old motherland of European civilisation, where the new life was first and most vehemently felt,—in Italy, the most remarkable constellations of these attractive figures were produced.

The women of Italy, at that period remarkable in different walks, and rich in various high gifts, form in truth a very notable phenomenon; and one sufficiently prevalent to justify the belief, that the general circumstances of that society favoured the production of such.

But the question remains, whether these brilliant types of womanhood, attractive as they are as subjects of study, curiously illustrative as they are of the social history of the times in which they lived, are on the whole such as should lead us to conclude, that the true path of progress would be found to lead towards social conditions that should be likely to reproduce them?

Supposing it to be asserted, that they were not so necessarily connected in the relationship of cause and effect with the whole social condition of the times in which they lived, as that any attempt to resuscitate such types need involve a reproduction of their social environment; even then the question would remain, whether, if it were really possible to take them as single figures out of the landscape in which they properly stand, they would be such as we should find it desirable to adopt as models of womanhood? Are these such as are wanted to be put in the van of our march—in the first ranks of nineteenth century civilisation? Not whether they are good to put in niches to be admired and cited for this or that virtue or capacity; nor even whether they might be deemed desirable captains in a woman's march towards higher destinies and better conditioned civilisation, if, indeed, such a progress were in any sane manner conceivable; but whether such women would work harmoniously and efficiently with all the other forces at our command for the advancement of a civilisation, of which the absolute *sine qua non* must be the increased solidarity, co-operation, and mutual influence of both the sexes?

It may be guessed, perhaps, from the tone of the

above sentences, that the writer is not one of those who think that the past can in this matter be made useful to us, as affording ready-made models for imitation. But he has no intention of dogmatising, or even indulging in speculations on "the woman's question." On the contrary, in endeavouring to set before the reader his little cabinet of types of womanhood, he has abstained from all attempt at pointing any moral of the sort. The wish to do so is too dangerously apt to lead one to assimilate one's portrait less carefully to the original than to a pattern figure conceived for the purpose of illustrating a theory. Whatever conclusions on the subject of woman's destiny, proper position, and means of development are to be drawn, therefore, from the consideration of the very varied and certainly remarkable types set before him, the reader must draw for himself. It has been the writer's object to show his portraits, more or less fully delineated according to their interest, and in some measure according to the abundance or the reverse of available material, in their proper setting of social environment. They have been selected, not so much with any intention of bringing together the best, greatest, or most admirable, nor even the most remarkable women Italy has produced, as with a view of securing the greatest amount of variety, in point of social position and character. Each figure of the small gallery will, it is hoped, be found to illustrate a distinct phase of Italian social life and civilisation.

The canonised Saint, that most extraordinary product of the "ages of faith," highly interesting as a

social, and perhaps more so still as a psychological phenomenon ;—the feudal Châtelaine, one of the most remarkable results of the feudal system, and affording a suggestive study of woman in man's place ;—the high-born and highly-educated Princess of a somewhat less rude day, whose inmost spiritual nature was so profoundly and injuriously modified by her social position ;—the brilliant literary denizen of “ La Bohème ;”—the equally brilliant but large-hearted and high-minded daughter of the people, whose literary intimacies were made compatible with the strictest feminine propriety, and whom no princely connections, lay and ecclesiastical, prevented from daring to think and to speak her thought, and to meet with brave heart the consequences of so doing ;—the popular actress, again a daughter of the people, and again in that, as is said, perilous walk in life, a model of correct conduct in the midst of loose-lived princesses ;—the nobly-born adventuress, every step in whose extraordinary *excelsior* progress was an advance in degradation and infamy, and whose history, in showing us court life behind the scenes, brings us among the worst company of any that the reader's varied journey will call upon him to fall in with ;—the equally nobly-born, and almost equally worthless woman, who shows us that wonderful and instructive phenomenon, the Queen of a papal court ;—the humbly born artist, admirable for her successful combination in perfect compatibility of all the duties of the home and the studio ;—and lastly, the poor representative of the effeteness of that social system which had produced the foregoing types, the net result, as may be said, of

the national passage through the various phases illustrated by them :—all these are curiously distinct manifestations of womanhood, and if any measure of success has been attained in the endeavour to represent them duly surrounded by the social environment which produced them, while they helped to fashion it, some contribution will have been made to a right understanding of woman's nature, and of the true road towards her more completely satisfactory social development.

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A DECADE OF ITALIAN WOMEN.

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA.

(1347—1380.)

CHAPTER I.

HER BIRTH-PLACE.

THERE are not many chapters of history more extraordinary and more perplexing than that which relates the story of St. Catherine. Very perplexing it will be found by any, who may think it worth while to examine the record;—which is indeed well worthy of examination, not only as illustrative of one of the most obscure phases of human nature, but also as involving some highly interesting questions respecting the value of historic evidence.

Of such examination it has received but little. Among Catholics the “legend” of the Saint is to this day extensively used for such purposes as similar legends were intended to serve. Orthodox teachers have used the story unsparingly as stimulus, example, and testimony. But orthodox historians have passed over it with the lightest tread and most hurried step;

while such Protestant readers as may have chanced to stray into the dim, despised wilderness of Romish hagiography, have in all probability very quickly tossed the volume aside, compendiously classing its subject in their minds with other dark-aged lumber of martyrs, who walked with their heads in their hands, and saints who personally maltreated the enemy of mankind.

Yet a very little consideration of the story will show, that it cannot with fairness be thus summarily disposed of. After seeing large solid masses of monastic romance and pious falsehood evaporate from the crucible of our criticism, there will be still found a very considerable residuum of strangely irreducible fact of the most puzzling description.

It is to be borne in mind, moreover, that the phenomena to be examined are not the product of the dark night-time of history, so favourable to the generation of saints and saintly wonders. Cock-crow was near at hand when Catherine walked the earth. The grandsons of her contemporaries had the printing-press among them; and the story of her life was printed at Florence in the ninety-seventh year after her death. While the illiterate Sienese dyer's daughter was working miracles, moral and physical, Petrarch and Boccaccio were still writing, and Dante had recently written. Giotto had painted the panels we still gaze on, and Niccolo of Pisa carved the stones we yet handle. Chroniclers and historians abounded; and the scene of the strange things recorded by them was at that time one of the centres of human civilisation and progress. We are there in no misty debateable land of myth and legendary song; but walk among familiar facts of solid well-authenticated history, studied for its lessons by statesmen, and accepted as the basis of

theories by political philosophers. And yet, in the midst of these indubitable facts, mixed with them, acting on them, undeniably influencing them, we come upon the records of a story wild as any tale of Denis or Dunstan.

When once launched on the strange narrative, as it has come down to us, it is somewhat difficult to remember steadily how near we are all along to the solid shore of indisputable fact. Holding fast to this, therefore, as long as may be, we will approach the subject by endeavouring to obtain some idea of the material aspect of the "locus in quo."

No one perhaps of the more important cities of Italy retains the visible impress of its old republican medieval life to so remarkable a degree as Siena. Less favoured by fortune than her old enemy, and present ruler, Florence, she has been less benefited or injured by the activity and changes of modern days. And the city retains the fossilised form and shape which belonged to it at the time when its own stormy old life was finally crushed out of it. The once turbulent, energetic, and brave old city, sits there still, on the cold bleak top of a long spent volcano—emblem meet enough of her own nature and fortunes—grim, silent, stern, in death. The dark massy stone fronts, grand and gloomy, of old houses, built to defy all the vicissitudes of civic broils, and partisan town-fighting, still frown over narrow streets, no longer animated by the turbulent tide of life which filled them during the centuries of the city's independence.

The strange old "piazza," once the pulsating heart, whence the hot tide of the old civic life flowed through all the body of the little state, still occupies its singular position in the hollow of what was in some remote

ante-Etruscan time, the crater of a volcano. Tall houses of five or six stories stand in a semicircle around this peculiar shell-shaped cup, while the chord of the arc they form, is furnished by the picturesque "palazzo pubblico," with its tall slender tower of dark brick, and quaintly painted walls. Like the lava tide, which at some distant period of the world's history flowed hence down the scored sides of the mountain, the little less boiling tide of republican war and republican commerce, which Siena was wont to pour out from the same fount, is now extinct and spent. But such lazy, stagnant, unwholesome life as despotism and priestcraft have left to Siena, is still most alive in and around the old piazza.

Up the sides of this doubly extinguished crater, and down the exterior flanks of the mountain, run steep, narrow, tortuous and gloomy, the flagstone-paved streets of the old city. So steep are they in some parts, that stairs have to take the place of the sloping flagstones, which are often laid at such an angle of declivity as to render wheel-traffic impossible. On the highest pinnacle of the rim, overlooking the hollow of the once crater, stands the Cathedral, on such uneven ground, that its east end is supported by a lofty baptistery, built underneath it on the rapid descent. In the most ornamented style of Italian-gothic architecture, and picturesque, though quaint, in its parti-coloured livery of horizontal black and white stripes in alternate courses of marble, the old church still contains a wonderful quantity of medieval Siennese art in many kinds. Carving in wood and in stone, painting in fresco and in oil, inlaid work and mosaic, richly coloured windows and gilded cornices, adorn walls, floor, and roof, in every part. The whole

history of art from the early days, when Sienese artists first timidly essayed to imitate barbaric Byzantine models, to its perfect consummation in those glorious ages which immediately preceded the downfall of Italian liberty, is set forth in this fine old church, as in a rich and overflowing museum. Some half dozen popes sleep beneath sculptured tons of monumental marble in different parts of it,—among them two of the very old Sienese family of Piccolomini.

On another peak, or spur, of the deeply seamed mountain, stands the huge unornamented brick church and monastery of St. Dominic, so situated, that between it and the Cathedral is a steep gorge, the almost precipitous sides of which the old city has covered with stair-like streets. Deep at the bottom of this gorge, near a gate in the city wall, which runs indefatigably up and down the mountain ridges and ravines in its circuit around the spacious city, now a world too wide for its shrunken population, is that old fountain, which one passing word of the great poet has made for ever celebrated. Here is still that Fontebranda,* which, with all its wealth of sparkling water, the thirst-tormented coiner in the thirtieth canto of the *Inferno*, less longs for than he does to see in torment with him those who had tempted him to the deed he was expiating.

The Dantescan pilgrim, who, among his first objects at Siena, runs to visit this precious fountain, finds, not without a feeling of disappointment, a square mass of heavy ugly brickwork, supported on some three or four unornamented arches on each of its four sides. Within is a large tank, also of brick, the sides of which rise

* See Note.

about two feet above the level of the soil; and this is perennially filled by a cool and pure spring from the sandstone side of the mountain, which there rises in a broken cliff immediately behind the ungraceful, though classic building. Descending the steep street in search of this poet-hallowed spot, with the Cathedral behind him, and St. Dominic's church high on its peak above and in front of him, the visitor finds that he is passing through a part of the city inhabited by the poorer classes of its people. And near the bottom of the hill, and around the fountain itself, it is manifest to more senses than one, that a colony of tanners and dyers is still established on the same site which their forefathers occupied, when Giacomo Benincasa was one of the guild.

The general aspect of this remote and low-lying corner of the city is squalid and repulsive. Eyes and nose are alike offended by all around them. And the stranger, who has been attracted thither by the well-remembered name of "Fontebranda," hastens to re-climb his way to the upper part of the town; probably unconscious, perhaps uncaring, that within a few yards of him lies another object of pilgrimage, classic after another fashion, and hallowed to the feelings of a far more numerous body of devotees. For a little way up the hill, on the left hand side of the poverty-stricken street, as one goes upwards, among the miserable and filthy-looking skin-dressers' houses, is still to be seen that of Giacomo Benincasa, in which his daughter Catherine, the future Saint, was born, in the year 1347, and lived during the greater portion of her short career.

The veneration of her fellow citizens during the two centuries which followed her death, has not permitted

the dwelling to remain altogether as it was when she inhabited it. The street front has been sufficiently altered to indicate to any passenger, that it belongs to some building of more note than the poor houses around it. Two stories of a "loggia," or arcade, of dark brick, supported on little marble columns,—four arches above, and four below,—run along the front of the upper part of the building. On the ground-floor, a large portal, like that of a chapel, such as in fact now occupies the entire basement story, sufficiently shows that the building within is no longer a poor dyer's habitation. On the side is a smaller door opening on a handsome straight stone staircase, eight feet wide. By this entrance visitors are admitted to gratify for an equal fee their Catholic devotion or heretic curiosity.

The whole lower floor of the house, once, as tradition, doubtless correctly, declares, the dyer's workshop (as similar portions of the neighbouring houses are still the workshops of modern dyers), is now a chapel. "Virginea Domus," is conspicuously carved in stone above the portal, somewhat unfairly ignoring the existence of poor Giacomo in his own workshop. The walls are covered with frescoes by Salimbeni and Pachierotti, and a picture by Sodoma adorns the altar. Ascending the handsome flight of stone stairs, the visitor finds most of the space on the first floor occupied by another chapel. This was the living room of the family, and is nearly as large as the workshop below. But at the end of it, farthest from the street, and therefore from the light also, there is a little dark closet, nine feet long by six wide. It is entered from the larger room by a very low door, cut in a very thick wall, and has no other means of receiving light or air. This was Catherine's bed-

chamber. The pavement of the little closet is of brick, and on this, with a stone—still extant *in situ*—for a pillow, the future Saint slept. The bricks, sanctified by this nightly contact with her person, have been boarded over to preserve them from the wear and tear of time, and from the indiscreet pilfering of devout relic-hunters.

Various treasures of this sort, such as the lamp she used to carry abroad, the handle of her staff, &c., are preserved on the altar of the adjoining chapel: and one or more other oratories have been built and ornamented in and about the Saint's dwelling-place. But the only spot which has any interest for a heretical visitor is the little dark and dismal hole—Catherine's own chamber and oratory—the scene of the young girl's nightly vigils, lonely prayers, spiritual struggles, and monstrous self-inflictions.

“Surely,” cries the pious pilgrim, “as holily penitential a cell, as ever agonized *De profundis* rose from to the throne of Grace!”

“Truly,” remarks the philosophic visitor, “a dormitory well calculated, in all its conditions, to foster and develop every morbid tendency of mind or body in its occupant!”

CHAPTER II.



THE SAINT'S BIOGRAPHER.

A GREAT number of devout writers have occupied their pens on "legends" and biographies of St. Catherine, more or less complete in their scope and pretensions. The public library at Siena contains no less than seventy-nine works, of which the popular Saint of the city is the subject. Almost all of them, however, seem to be based more or less directly and avowedly on the work of "the Blessed" Raymond of Capua.

Perhaps some heretic's untutored mind may be so ignorant as not to know that the adjective joined to Raymond in the preceding sentence is not only an epithet, but a title. "Beatification," is a spiritual grade inferior to "sanctification," conferred by the same unerring authority, and implying different and inferior privileges and position.

Childish trash enough it seems. Yet may not possibly some disciple of that modern school of moralists, which teaches that happiness is not, or should not be man's highest and ultimate aim, see in this assertion of the superiority of "sanctification" to "blessedness," one of the many instances in which Rome's pettifogging formalism and unspiritual materialism have fossilised a lofty thought into a low absurdity?

Be this as it may, Raymond of Capua was never in Rome's hierarchy "more than blessed."

This "Beato Raimondo" was "in the world" Raimondo delle Vigne, great-grandson of Pietro delle Vigne, the celebrated Chancellor of the Emperor Frederick II., who right royally rewarded his life-long services by putting his eyes out. Raymond his great-grandson was a Dominican monk; and became* twenty-fourth general of the order, in 1578, at the time when a schism in the Church, divided between two popes, produced a corresponding schism in all the monastic orders. Raymond governed that portion of the Dominican fraternity which recognised the Pope, subsequently acknowledged by the Church as the true one.

Having been sent, in 1367, to preside over the Dominican convent in Siena, he was there by divine† intervention, say the learned historians of the literature of the order, appointed confessor and confidant to St. Catherine. The superior sanctity of the penitent was however soon made manifest. For when Siena was ravaged by a pestilence, in 1372, and Prior Raymond having caught it, while ministering to the sick, lay dying, he was miraculously restored to health by the prayers of St. Catherine.

The General of the Dominicans, as he shortly afterwards became, was a man of mark, moreover, beyond the limits of his own Society; for he was employed on several missions and negotiations by the Pope. With such qualifications and opportunities, he certainly would seem to have been the most competent

* Quetif et Echard, *Script. Ord. Præd.*, tom. i. p. 679.

† "Eique coelitus datus est a confessionibus et divinorum secretorum conscius."—Quetif et Echard, *Script. Ord. Præd.*, tom. i. p. 679.

person imaginable to give the world an account of his saintly penitent's career. This he has done in a work often reprinted, and most recently at Milan, in two good-sized octavo volumes, in 1851. The "Life of Saint Catherine of Siena, the Seraphic spouse of Jesus Christ" forms volumes nine and ten of an "Ecclesiastical Library," brought out at a very cheap rate, as a means of supplying the people of Italy in the nineteenth century with wholesome and profitable mental food.

A glance at the nature and quality of this work is desirable for several reasons. In the first place, it is necessary to ascertain how far we can implicitly rely on its statements of matters of fact respecting Catherine's history. In the second place, a knowledge of the mental calibre and intellectual standing of the Saint's confessor, confidant, and friend, cannot but assist us in estimating her own character. And lastly, it is no little interesting to observe what spiritual and intellectual provender is provided in these days for the population of Italy by those who have the education and guidance of her people in their hands.

This widely circulated work is an Italian translation from the original Latin of Father Raymond, executed by Bernardino Pecci, Bishop of Grosseto. In the notice of St. Catherine, in the "Biographie Universelle," it is stated, among a singularly large number of other* errors, that Raymond translated into Latin the Life of the Saint from the Italian of Fra Tommaso della Fonte, who preceded him in his office of confessor, making some additions to the original text. But a

* Among others, the writer refers to a life of St. Catherine, by Pietro Aretino. That most versatile of literary scamps did, indeed, write such a work; but it is the life of an altogether different St. Catherine!

very cursory examination of the book would have sufficed to show the French writer that, although Father Raymond frequently cites Fra Tommaso as the authority for some of his statements, the entire composition is wholly the work of the former.

An equally short glance at this "Life" will also suffice to convince any one in search of the facts of the Saint's career, that little assistance is to be got from Father Raymond. It is indeed very evident, that the author did not write with any intention of furnishing such. He rarely gives any dates, and scarcely makes any pretence of observing chronological order. He says, that he writes in his own old age, long after the events occurred; owns that he forgets much; and, though carefully and ostentatiously winding up every chapter with a reference to his authorities for the statements contained in it, is yet avowedly throwing together a mass of anecdotal recollections, as they occur to him. He rarely, if ever, records any unmiraculous and unsaintly doings;—mentions, for instance, that she performed such and such miracles at Pisa, or discoursed in such and such terms at Genoa; but does not give the slightest hint why she went thither, or when. In short, the whole scope and object of the book is devotional, and in no degree historic. It is written for the promotion of piety, and especially for the glory of the Order of St. Dominic, and of the Dominican St. Catherine. The wonders related are evidently intended to cap other wonders. They constantly consist of performances essentially similar to those recorded of older saints, but enhanced by some added circumstance of extra impossibility. And the writer, in his competitive eagerness, often pauses in his narration to point out, that no former recorded

miracles have come up to that he is relating in outrageousness of contradiction to the laws of nature.

Were it not, however, for these and such like evidences of the *animus* of the writer, and were it not also, it must be added, for the exceeding difficulty of supposing that an undoubtedly distinguished man, a contemporary of Petrarch and Boccaccio, could have believed the monstrous impossibilities he relates as facts,—the tone of the book would seem to be that of sincerity. In a subsequent chapter, the reader will have an opportunity of examining some specimens of these extraordinary relations. For the present, as a taste of the quality of this remarkable book, *reprinted in 1851 for wide circulation among the readers of Italy*, and as a means of judging how far it is possible to credit the writer with simple-hearted sincerity, he may take the following passages from a long prologue of thirty pages, which the learned author opens with a quotation from the Apocalypse, “I saw an angel descending from Heaven, having the key of the Abyss and a great chain in his hand;”—and in which he points out the application of these words to St. Catherine. Having shown at much length that she may well be considered an angel descending from Heaven, he proceeds thus:—*

“Finally we find added to the words of St. John, which have been taken as a foundation for this prologue, the following phrase: ‘*Et catenam magnam habens in manu suâ;*’ which, like those that precede them, adapt themselves to our subject, and explain the significance of her name. What wonder is it, that Catherine should have a chain,—*catena*? Is there

* Vita di Cat., vol. i. p. 19.

then no agreement in the sound of the two words? Since if you pronounce 'Caterina' with a syncope, you have 'Catena;' and if to 'Catena' you join a syllable, you have the name of 'Caterina.' Shall we attach ourselves then to words and appearances only, neglecting the things and the mysteries signified by these words? Not only the words, but also the things themselves point out to us the applicability. Since *catha* in the Greek tongue signifies that which in the Latin is *universe*.* Hence also the Catholic Church is from the force of the Greek word properly called in Latin Universal. Caterina therefore and Catena signify in our tongue University; which thing also a chain—*catena*—manifests in its very nature."

After many pages of such extraordinary nonsense, he arrives at the conclusion, that Caterina certainly means Universality, and that in this name, made Catena by syncope, "lies hidden perhaps no small mystery!"

It does seem wholly incredible, that this should be the best product of the mind of one, chosen out to be the foremost of the Dominicans of his day, and selected by the Pope to be entrusted with important missions. It is difficult not to suspect, that this great-grandson of Frederick II.'s famous Chancellor was a very different man, when subtly diplomatising in Rome's interest with courts and princes, or when considering in council the interests of his order, from what he shows himself when addressing the people. Surely the *Concio ad Populum* must have differed from the *Concio ad Clerum* as widely as any sect's esoteric ever did from its exoteric doctrines. And the "no

* It may be noted for the unlearned reader, that, though *catholic* signifies *universal*, *catha* has no such sense.

small mystery of Caterina cut down by syncope to Catena," was, we may well believe, not the subject of very serious meditations behind the screen on the priestly side of the altar. Is it indeed possible to abstain from the conviction, that we have detected the reverend figure of Father Raymond of Capua, General of the Dominicans, very decidedly laughing in his sleeve at that poor ill-used people, to whose proneness to be deceived, Rome has ever answered with so ready and so hearty a *decipiatur*?

One other specimen of the quality of this Dominican monk's work may not be superfluous in enabling the reader to make up his mind respecting him and his teaching.

He tells us* that Catherine, when in her seventh year, retired one day into some corner of the house, where she could not be seen or overheard, and thus prayed:—

“O most blessed and holy Virgin, first among women to consecrate by a perpetual vow thy virginity to the Lord, by whom thou wast graciously made mother of His only begotten son, I pray of thy ineffable goodness, that without considering my merits or my weakness, thou wouldst be pleased to do me the great favour † of giving me for husband Him, whom I desire with all the passion of my soul, thy most Holy Son, our only Lord Jesus Christ; and I promise to Him and to thee, that I will never receive any other husband, and that with all my power I will preserve for Him my purity ever unblemished.”

“Do you perceive, O reader!” continues the biographer, “with what order all the graces and

* Vita di Cat., vol. i. p. 46.

† “Vi contentiate di farmi una grazia si grande.”

virtuous operations of this Holy Virgin are powerfully and sweetly regulated by that Wisdom which disposes all things? In the *sixth* year of her age, while yet seeing her spouse with the eyes of the body, she gloriously received his benediction. In the *seventh* year, she made the vow of chastity. The first of these numbers is superior to all others in perfection: and the latter is called by all theologians, the number of Universality. What then can be understood from this, if not that this Virgin was destined to receive from the Lord the *Universal Perfection* of all the virtues; and consequently to possess a perfect degree of glory? Since the first number signifies Perfection, and the second Universality, what can they signify, when put together, other than Universal Perfection? Wherefore she was properly called Catherine,* which signifies, as has been shown, Universality."

This, and some three or four hundred closely printed pages of similar material, has recently (1851) been published at a price, which only a very large circulation could make possible. "And yet," cry the priests and priest-ridden rulers of the nations for whom this spiritual food is provided, "we are accused of keeping our people in ignorance, and discouraging reading! On the contrary, we carefully teach our flocks, and seek but to provide them wholesome instead of poisonous mental food. Here is reading, calculated to make men good Christians, good subjects—and to keep them quiet."

Volumes might yet be written, and not superfluously, though many have been written already, on the deli-

* It may be just mentioned, for the benefit of the English reader, that the name Catherine, as may be seen from any dictionary, is derived from the Greek adjective signifying "pure."

berate, calculated, and intentional soul-murder perpetrated by this "safe" literature! And it is curious to mark how this poor sainted Catherine, and her "blessed" confessor are still active agents for evil nearly five hundred years after the sepulchre has closed on them!

" Like vampyres they steal from their tombs,
To suck out life's pith with their lying,"

as a poet sings, who has well marked the working of saints and saint-worship in that unhappy land.

Truth is immortal! as is often said. Yes! but men do not perhaps so often consider, that, as far as human ken may extend, falsehood unhappily is in its consequences equally immortal.

CHAPTER III.



THE FACTS OF THE CASE.

LITTLE reliable information as to the real unmiraculous events of Catherine Benincasa's life is to be obtained, as has been seen, from the pages of her professed biographer. But there is another pietistic work, forming part of the same "Ecclesiastical Library," in which Father Raymond's book has been recently reprinted, that offers somewhat better gleanings to the inquirer into the facts of the case. This is a reprint in four volumes (Milan, 1843-4) of the Saint's Letters, with the annotations of the Jesuit, Father Frederick Burlamacchi. These letters had been already several times published, when the learned Lucchese Jesuit undertook to edit them in the beginning of the eighteenth century. The former editions were imperfect, incorrect, and uncommented. But the Jesuit, jesuitlike, has done his work well; and his notes, appended to the end of each letter, contain abundant information respecting the persons to whom they are addressed, the events and people alluded to in them, and, wherever attainable, the dates at which they were written. To the labours therefore of Father Burlamacchi is due most of the information thrown together in the following concise account of Catherine's career; in which it is intended, leaving aside saintship and miracles for a moment, to give the reader a

statement of those facts only which a sceptical inquirer may admit to be historical.

Thus denuded of all devotional "improvement," and of all those portions of the narrative which alone clerical writers have for the most part thought much worth preserving, the story can present but a very skeleton outline indeed; for the notices of the Saint to be met with in contemporary lay writers are singularly few and scanty.

Catherine was one of the youngest of a family of twenty-five children. Her twin sister died a few days after her birth. At a very early age she was observed to be taciturn, and solitary in her habits; and was remarkable for the small quantity of nourishment she took. At about twelve years old she manifested her determination to devote herself to a religious life. The modes of this manifestation, and the difficulties she encountered in carrying her wishes into execution against the opposition of her family, as related by her biographer, are curious; but cannot be admitted into this chapter of "facts."

Some few years later than this, it should seem,—but Father Raymond's aversion to dates does not permit us to ascertain exactly at what age,—Catherine, with much difficulty, and being confined to her bed by illness at the time, persuaded her mother to go to certain religious women attached to the order of St. Dominic, and prefer to them her petition to be admitted among them. These devotees were termed—"Mantellate di S. Domenico,"—"the cloaked women of St. Dominic;" and they appear to have been bound by the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. But they were not strictly nuns, as they were not cloistered, but lived each in her own habitation, and

went about the city freely. On these grounds the Mantellate made much difficulty about receiving Catherine into their society; alleging, that they conferred their habit only on widows, or elderly single women, as scandal would be caused by a young woman leading a single but uncloistered life. On being further urgently entreated, however, on the behalf of Catherine, they agreed to send a deputation of their body to visit the sick girl, promising to receive her, if it should be found that, though young, she was not pretty. The deputed judges came; and to Catherine's great delight pronounced favourably as to the absence of any disqualifying personal charms; though the more gallant confessor insinuates, that their decision was in great part influenced by the effects of illness on the candidate's appearance. She was accordingly made a sister of St. Dominic, and placed under the spiritual guidance and direction of the friars of that order.

Then we have exceedingly copious accounts of penitences, austerities, and abstinence, which, though in all probability true to a frightful degree, yet, certainly cannot, as related by Father Raymond, be accepted as unmiraculous truths. One circumstance mentioned by him, however, at this point of his narrative, does not seem liable to any suspicion, and is worth noting. Her early confessors, he says, did not believe the miraculousness of her fasts and sufferings.

From this period to the end of her life we have accounts of her frequent, apparently daily, "ecstasies," or fits. And it is interesting to observe, that the descriptions of these seizures given by her biographer on more than one occasion, show them to have been very evidently of a cataleptic nature. The Dominican monk of course has not, or at least does not manifest a

the least suspicion that these "ecstasies" were attributable to any other than a directly miraculous cause. But his account is sufficiently accurate to render the matter satisfactorily clear to modern readers.

The passage, in which he first speaks of these fits, of his own doubts concerning the nature of them, and especially of the mode he adopted to arrive at a correct decision on this point, is sufficiently curious.

"Shortly* afterwards," he says, having been telling the story of some vision, "she lost the use of her corporal senses and fell into ecstasy. Hence proceeded all the wonderful things that subsequently took place, both as regards her abstinence, such as is not practised by others, her admirable teaching, and the manifest miracles, which Almighty God, even during her lifetime, showed before our eyes. Wherefore, since here is the foundation, the root, and the origin of all her holy works . . . I sought every means and every way, by which I might investigate whether her operations were from the Lord, or from another source,—whether they were true or fictitious. For I reflected, that now was the time of that third beast with the leopard's skin, by which hypocrites are pointed out; and that in my own experience I had found some, especially among the women, who easily deceive themselves, and are more readily seduced by the enemy, as was manifested in the case of the first mother of us all. Other matters also presented themselves to my mind, which constrained me to remain uncertain and dubious concerning this matter. While I was thus in doubt, unable to acquire a strong conviction on either side of the question, and anxiously wishing to be

* Vita di Cat., vol. i. p. 81.

guided by Him, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, it struck me, that if I could be certain, that by means of her prayers I had obtained from the Lord a great and unusual sense of contrition for my sins, beyond anything I was wont to feel, this should be for me a perfect proof that all her operations proceeded from the Holy Ghost."

He then recounts at length, what may be as well told in a few words,—how he besought her to pray for him, telling her, that he desired to have a proof of the efficacy of her prayer by being conscious of an unusually strong sense of contrition within himself,—how she promised that he assuredly should have this proof,—how he was next day confined to his bed by illness, and so weak as to be hardly able to speak; and how, being then visited and exhorted by Catherine, who herself left with difficulty a sick bed to come to him, he *did* feel especially and unusually contrite; and so the required proof was complete, and he was ever after ready to accept any amount of miraculous performance on the part of the Saint with perfect faith in its reality and sanctity.

Did the diplomatist General of the Dominicans really think that he had obtained the *proof*, he says he wished for? Were the other women, whom he had deemed impostors or dupes of the evil one, equally devoted to and in the hands of the Dominican Order, equally fervent and promising in their vocation of saintship, and equally endowed with the strength of character and will, which united to her physical infirmities, rendered Catherine so rarely and highly valuable an instrument for the promotion of "religion" and the glory of the order?—questions, which must be left to the consideration of the reader.

On a subsequent occasion, Father Raymond describes* more at length the nature of the seizure, to which Catherine was subject. We are told that,—

“Whenever the remembrance of her sacred husband,”—by which phrase thousands of times repeated in the course of his work, the monk always alludes to our Saviour,—“became a little refreshed in that holy mind, *she withdrew herself as much as she could* from her corporal senses; and her extremities, that is to say, her hands and her feet became contracted and deadened; her fingers first. Then her limbs became so strongly fixed both in themselves, and attached to the places which they touched, that it would have been more possible to break them to pieces than to remove them in any wise. The eyes also were perfectly closed; and the neck was rendered so rigid, that it was not a little dangerous to her to touch her neck at such moments.”

The frequency and duration of these attacks appear to have increased. At a later period† of his narrative, Father Raymond tells us that “the inferior and sensitive part of her nature abandoned her for the greater part of her time, and left her deprived of sensation. Of which,” he says, “we are assured a thousand times by seeing and touching her arms and her hands so rigidified, that it would have been easier to break the bone, than remove them from the position in which they were. The eyes were completely shut; the ears did not hear any sound however great, and all the bodily senses were entirely deprived of their proper action.”

These passages will leave little doubt on the minds

* Vita di Cat., vol. i. p. 114.

† *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 153.

of any who have witnessed the phenomena of catalepsy, that Catherine was habitually subject to attacks of that complaint. The hint to be derived from the writer's declaration, that she threw herself into this state "as much as she could," is worthy of notice; and will not seem surprising to those who have studied this form of disease. Those also, who have watched the physical phenomena of animal magnetism, will not fail to remark the similarity of the facts recorded of Catherine, to those they have been accustomed to observe.

For several years of her life after her profession, and previous to 1376, we find various undated intimations of her being in different cities of Tuscany; and Father Raymond has recorded her complaints, that people both secular and of "the order," had been scandalised by her frequent travelling, whereas she had never gone any whither, she declares, except for the salvation of souls. But when it is remembered what travelling was in those days, and that to go from Siena to Florence, Pisa, or Lucca, was to cross the frontier of her own country, and traverse the dominions of foreign and often hostile states, it seems strange, that a young girl of obscure origin, and necessarily with small pecuniary resources at her command, should have found the means of travelling about the world, accompanied, as she appears always to have been, by a suite of confessors and other ecclesiastical followers. To render these journeyings yet more difficult and puzzling, we find contemporary mention of her frequent illness. She is again and again confined to her bed by fever, and "her ordinary infirmities," and "accustomed sufferings;"—a state of things that would seem to put out of the question for her the wandering mendicant friar's ordinary inexpensive mode of locomotion.

Not a word, however, is to be found throwing light on any such difficulties ; and they must be left to the reader, as they present themselves. It may be noted, however,—rather, though, to the increase than to the lessening of the strangeness of the circumstances,—that by special Papal Bull she was permitted to carry with her a portable travelling altar, and the confessors who accompanied her were specially licensed to absolve all such penitents as came to the Saint for spiritual advice and edification.

In the year 1376 Catherine was in her twenty-ninth year; and we then come to the most important and most remarkable incident in her career. At that time Gregory XI., the last of seven French popes, who had succeeded one another in the chair of St. Peter, was living at Avignon, where for the last seventy-three years the Papal Court had resided to the infinite discontent and considerable injury of Italy. To put an end to this absenteeism, and bring back the Pontiff, and all the good things that would follow in his train, was the cherished wish of all good Italians, and especially of all Italian churchmen. Petrarch had urgently pressed Gregory's predecessor, Urban V., to accomplish the desired change ; Dante had at an earlier period laboured to accomplish the same object. But it was not altogether an easy step to take. The French Cardinals who surrounded the Pope at Avignon were of course eager to keep him and the Court in their own country. The King of France was equally anxious to detain him. The French Pope's likings and prejudices of course pointed in the same direction. Rome too was very far just then from offering an agreeable or inviting residence. The dominions of the Church were in a state of almost universal rebellion.

The turbulence of the great Roman barons was such, that going to live among them seemed as safe and as pleasant as finding a residence in a den of ruffians.

Thus all the representations of the Italian Church, and all the spiritual and temporal interests, which so urgently needed the ruler's presence in his dominions, had for some years past not sufficed to bring back the Pope to Rome. Under these circumstances Catherine, the obscure Sieneſe dyer's illiterate daughter, determined to try her powers of persuasion and argument on the Pontiff, and proceeded to Avignon for that purpose in the ſummer of 1376. In the September of that ſame year, the Pope ſet out on his return to Rome! The dyer's daughter ſucceeded in her enterpriſe, and moved the centre of Europe once more back again to its old place in the eternal city!

It ſhould ſeem, that ſhe was alſo charged by the government of Florence, then at war with the Pope, to make their peace with him. And this object alſo, though it was not accompliſhed on the occaſion of her viſit to Avignon, ſhe appears to have ſubſequent-ly contributed to bring to a ſatisfactory termination. But it is remarkable, that in none of the ſix letters to Gregory, written in the early months of 1376, does ſhe ſpeak a word on the ſubject of Florence. The great object of her anxiety is the Pope's return to Rome. There are four letters extant written by her* to Gregory, while ſhe was in Avignon. But neither in theſe is the buſineſs of the Florentines touched on. So that we muſt ſuppoſe, ſays Father Burlamacchi in his notes to Letter VII., that this affair was treated by

* That is, by the hand of her ſecretary; of which more anon.

the Pope and the Saint in personal interviews,* or in other letters now lost.

But it seems strange, that she should write elaborate letters to a person inhabiting the same town, and with whom she was doubtless in the habit of having frequent personal intercourse. And the suspicion naturally arises that these compositions were intended, at all events in great measure, for the perusal of others besides the person to whom they were avowedly written. One of them is extant in the form of a Latin translation by Father Raymond. It is true, that that language was probably the only medium of communication between the Italian Saint and the French Pope. Nevertheless, the question,—Did this letter ever originally exist in any other form than the Dominican's Latin? presents itself.

The following testimony however of the historian Ammirato, who wrote about two hundred years after the events of which we are speaking, seems to show decisively, that from her own time to that of the author, she was generally considered to have been the principal cause of the restoration of the Papal Court to Rome.

“There was living,” he writes,† “in those days a young virgin born in Siena, who from the great austerity of her life, from the fervour of her zeal of charity, and indefatigable perseverance in all good works, was even in her life-time deemed holy by all, and is so by the writer of these lines, though the

* There is a letter from her to the war commissioners in Florence, written from Avignon, 28th of June, 1376, ten days after her arrival there, in which she speaks of an interview she had had with the Pope on this subject. It is the 197th letter of the collection.

† Ammirato, *Istorie Fiorentine*, vol. v. p. 130. Edit. Florence, 1824.

reader may perceive, that he has no special devotion to her. Nor was this opinion conceived without the appearance to many persons of wonderful signs of a miraculous and supernatural character." Having briefly described these wonders in words, which certainly do not reveal any disbelief of them in his own mind, he continues thus:—

"It came into the minds therefore of those, who then governed Florence, that she might be of use in effecting a treaty of peace with the Pope. And if they had themselves no really sincere desire for this, yet the employment of her in the matter served to prove to others, who were opposed to the war with the Pope, that no efforts were wanting on their part to obtain peace. Being, therefore, urged by the war* commissioners to proceed to Avignon on this mission, she did not refuse to undertake it, but went thither, as is related by herself in one of her letters. And it is a certain fact, not only that she was well received and affectionately listened to by the Pope, but that by her instances he was induced to restore the Apostolic seat to Rome."

Not having been able to bring the negotiation for peace to a conclusion, she returned to Florence in the autumn of 1376, and remained there living in a house provided for her by Niccolo Soderini† and others connected with the government, while she continued to use her influence in every possible way for the conclusion of a treaty. Becoming thus well known to the Florentines, she was, says Ammirato, "considered by some to be a bad woman, as in more recent times,

* The "otto della guerra;" a committee of eight, appointed to carry on the war.

† Ammirato, vol. v. p. 133.

similar opinions have been held respecting Jerome Savonarola."

It should seem, however, that Catherine must have been favourably known in Florence some years before this time from an incidental notice of the chronicler, Del Migliore, who has recorded that in 1370 her brothers were publicly presented with the freedom of the city. And it is difficult to suppose that such an honour could have been conferred on them on any other grounds than the celebrity of their saintly sister.

Muratori also testifies,* that Catherine contributed much to the restoration of the Papal Court to Rome, saying that she wrote to the Pope on the subject. He appears not to have been aware that she went thither.

Again, Maimbourg, who took the contrary side in the great schism, which so soon afterwards divided the Church into two camps, and who is far from being prejudiced in favour of Catherine, admits that the Pope, "resolved at last to re-establish the see in Rome, in consequence of the urgent and repeated solicitations of St. Catherine of Siena."†

The Abate Ughelli bears his testimony ‡ also to the efficacy of Catherine's exertions in this matter.

"The greatest part," he says, "of the praise due to Gregory's return to Rome belongs to Catherine of Siena, who with infinite courage made the journey to Avignon, and at last induced the Pontiff to return, and by his presence dispel those evils which had shockingly overrun all Italy in consequence of the absence of the popes. So that it is not surprising, that writers, who rightly understood the matter, should have said

* Muratori, *Annali*, ad ann. 1376.

† *Hist. du grand Schis. d'Occid.*, lib. i. p. 11.

‡ Ughelli, *Ital. Sacra*, vol. i. col. 45.

that Catherine, the virgin of Siena, brought back to God the abandoned Apostolical seat on her shoulders."

It should appear, then, that it must be admitted, strange as it may seem, among the *facts* of the Saint's life, that the restoration of the Pope and his Court to Rome, that great change so important to all Europe, so long battled and struggled for and against, by kings, cardinals, and statesmen, was at last brought about by her.

Without pausing at present to look further into a result so startling, it will be better to complete this chapter, by briefly adding the few other authentically known facts of her story which remain to be told.

Gregory XI. died on the 27th of March, 1378. On the 7th of April sixteen cardinals entered into conclave for the election of his successor. Of these, eleven were Frenchmen, and all of course anxious to elect a Frenchman. But seven out of the eleven being Limousins, were bent on creating one of their number Pope. The other four Frenchmen were opposed to this; and by favour of this dissension the Italians succeeded in placing an Italian, Bartolomeo Prignano, in the sacred chair, who took the name of Urban VI.

This took place while Catherine was still at Florence. There are two letters written by her thence to the new Pope. In one of them she alludes to a "scandalo," which had occurred; and was in truth nothing less than a city tumult, in which some turbulent rioters of the anti-church party had threatened her life. It is recorded,* that the Saint intrepidly presented herself before the mob, saying, "I am Catherine. Kill me, if you will!"—on which they were abashed and slunk off.

* Burlamacchi, Epis., vol. i. p. 92.

Two other letters to Urban VI. follow, which appear to have been written from Siena; and on the 28th of November, 1378, in obedience to the Papal commands, she arrived in Rome. There are then four more letters written to the Pope after that date; and on the 29th day of April, 1380, she died at the age of thirty-three, after long and excruciating sufferings.

Father Raymond was at Genoa at that time; and declares that in that city at the hour of her death, he heard a voice communicating to him a last message from Catherine, which he afterwards found she had uttered on her death-bed, word for word as he heard it. "And of this," he adds, solemnly, "let that Eternal Truth, which can neither deceive nor be deceived, be witness." Nevertheless, some may be inclined to think that this statement has no right to be included among the *facts* of the case. Such sceptics may, however, be reminded that it is a certain and not altogether unimportant fact, that Father Raymond makes this solemn assertion.

The extant letters of the Saint, 198 in number, are also facts, of a very singular and puzzling nature. But it will be more convenient to defer any examination of this part of the subject to a future and separate chapter.

CHAPTER IV.



THE CHURCH VIEW OF THE CASE.

AUTHENTIC history, conceiving herself justified, probably, in leaving a saint in the hands of her own professional advisers and chroniclers, has meddled so little with Catherine biographically, that it was easy to give within the limits of a short chapter a tolerably complete summary of all that can be said to be really known of her story. The professional records of her career as Saint and Thaumaturgist on the other hand are exuberant, minute in detail, and based on abundance of that sort of evidence to their veracity, which the writers of such narratives are wont to consider as most irrefragable and conclusive. And these stories are by no means deficient in interest even to those, whose habits of mind lead them to distinguish widely between such and the materials for what they would admit to be history. For it is a genuine historical fact, and one of no light importance, that these things *were* believed, were written by men of learning, and are *still* believed by thousands. It is an historical, as well as a very curious psychological fact, that the statements in question were considered by the writers and thousands of readers of them during many generations to have been proved to be true by the evidence adduced. And it is an historical question, far more interesting, unfortunately, than easy to be solved, who

were the believers of the officially received narrative, and who were not.

For these reasons the Church view of the case, is at least as important a part of any satisfactory account of the Saint as the lay view, which was the subject of the last chapter. But all attempt to state the former with the completeness with which it has been sought to lay the latter before the reader, would, within any limits endurable by Englishmen of the nineteenth century, be wholly futile. It will be necessary to proceed by way of specimen-giving. And in the present case that compendious mode of examination will not be so unsatisfactory as it sometimes is found to be. For the masses of visions, penitences, revelations, and miracles recorded, with their respective confirmatory evidences, are so perfectly homogeneous in their nature, that the handful may very confidently be accepted as a fair sample of the contents of the sack.

The austerities and self-inflictions by which she prepared herself for her career internally, and at the same time gave proof of her vocation externally to those around her, began at an almost incredibly early age, and went on increasing gradually in intensity and monstrosity till they pass from the probable to the highly improbable, and thence to the manifestly impossible and miraculous. The line of demarcation which limits the latter, will be differently drawn by different minds. But the perfectly authentic records of human achievement in this department, are such as warn us against absolutely refusing our belief to any horrible self-torment under which life may possibly be retained.

At *five* years old, it was her practice in going up stairs to kneel at each step to the Virgin.

She habitually flogged herself, and induced other

children to imitate her in doing so, at six years of age. At seven, she deprived herself of a great portion of her food, secretly giving it to her brother, or throwing it to the cats. At the same age, she would watch from the window to see when a Dominican monk passed, and as soon as ever he had moved on, she used to run out and kiss the spot on the pavement on which he had placed his feet.

At twelve years old, being then marriageable, her mother begged her to comb her hair and "wash her face oftener." But this she steadfastly refused to do, till her mother having requested a married sister for whom Catherine had the warmest affection, to use her influence with her, she yielded, and began to pay some attention to the cleanliness of her person and the neatness of her dress. "When she afterwards confessed this fault to me," says the "Blessed" Raymond, "she spoke of it with such sighs and tears, that you would have supposed she had been guilty of some great sin. And as I know that, now that she is in heaven, it is lawful for me to reveal such things as redound to her praise, though they were heretofore secret, I have determined to insert here what passed between her and me on this subject. For she frequently made a general* confession to me, and always when she came to this point, she bitterly accused herself with sobs and tears. So that although I knew that it is the peculiarity of virtuous souls to believe that sin exists where in truth it does not,"—(observe the morality and think a little of the practical and psychological consequences of it)—"and to deem it great, where it is in fact small, nevertheless, since Catherine accused herself as

* That is, not only of such things as have occurred since the last confession, but of all the sins of a life-time.

meriting eternal punishment for the above fault, I was obliged to ask her, whether in acting as she had done, she had at all proposed or wished to violate her vow of chastity? To which she replied, that no such thought had ever entered her heart. I again asked her, whether, since she had no intention of transgressing her vow of virginity, she had done this in order to please any man in particular, or all men in general? And she answered that nothing gave her so much pain, as to see men, or be seen by them, or to be where any of them were. So that whenever any of her father's workmen, who lived in the house with him, came into any place where she chanced to be, she used to run from them, as if they had been serpents, so that all wondered at her." (Note the general state of manners and individual state of mind indicated by the fact, that such conduct should be deemed a praiseworthy proof of maidenly purity!) "She never," she said, "placed herself at the window, or at the door of the house to look at those who passed."—(Surely the Saint forgot her pious habit of looking out for the Dominicans, in order to kiss their footsteps.)—"Then I asked her in reply, for what reason this act of having attended to her dress, especially if it were not done in excess, merited eternal punishment? She answered, that she had loved her sister too much, and appeared to love her more than she loved God, for which reason she wept inconsolably, and did most bitter penance. And on my wishing to reply, that, although there might have been some excess, yet seeing that there had been no bad or even vain intention, there was nothing contrary to divine precept, she lifted up her eyes and voice to God, crying, 'O Lord my God, what kind of spiritual father have I now, who excuses my sins?

Was it right then, Father, that this bad and most worthless creature, who without labour or merit of her own has received so many favours from her Creator, should spend her time in adorning this putrid flesh, at the instigation of any mortal? Hell, I think, would have been no sufficient punishment for me, if the divine mercy had not shown me pity.' Thereupon," concludes the conscientious confessor, "I was constrained to be silent." He felt that his penitent's view of her sin was the just one, as indeed was sufficiently shown by the following conclusion of the story of the Saint's temporary backsliding.

Her sister continued to persuade her to pay attention to her person. "But the omnipotent Lord not being able any longer to endure that his chosen bride should in any way be kept at a distance from him, removed that obstacle which prevented her from uniting herself to God. For Bonaventura, the Saint's married sister, who instigated her to vanity, being near the time of her confinement, died in child-birth, young as she was. Observe, O reader, how displeasing and hateful to God it is to impede or divert those who wish to serve him. This Bonaventura was, as has been said, a very worthy woman, both in her conduct and in her conversation; but because she endeavoured to draw back to the world her who wished to serve God, she was smitten by the Lord, and punished with a very painful death." Take care, therefore, what you do, all mothers and sisters, of any who may seem to have a vocation for the cloister, lest you share the fate of Bonaventura Benincasa, doomed by God to a fearful death for having persuaded her sister to wash her face!

And to such practical teaching is the Saint's story moralised to this day even as 500 years ago!

At about this period of Catherine's life—to return to the series of her penances and mortifications—she wholly abandoned the use of animal food. At fifteen she left off wine. At twenty she gave up bread, living only on uncooked vegetables. She used to sleep but one quarter of an hour in the twenty-four; always flogged herself till the blood streamed from her three times a day; and lived three years without speaking. She wore a chain of iron round her body, which gradually eat its way into her flesh. And finally, she remained wholly without food for many years. This Father Raymond declares to have been the case within his own knowledge, and adds with much triumph, “that we know from Scripture that Moses fasted twice during a space of forty days, and Elias once, and that our Saviour accomplished the same, as the Gospel tells us: but a fast of many years has not hitherto been known.”

Passing from the Saint's achievements in this kind, we find her equally distancing all competitors in the matter of personal and familiar communication and conversation with the Deity.

She began to have visions at six years old. Returning home one day about that time, through the streets of Siena, she saw in the sky *immediately over the Dominican's church* a throne, with Christ sitting on it dressed in Papal robes, accompanied by St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. John.

At a later period, Christ appeared to her daily as soon as she retired to her cell, as she informed Father Raymond, for the purpose of teaching her the doctrines of religion, which, said she to her confessor, “no man or woman ever taught me, but only our Lord Jesus Christ himself, sometimes by means of inspira-

tion, and sometimes by means of a clear bodily appearance, manifest to the bodily senses, and talking with me, as I now talk with you."

Again, a little farther on in her career, we read that "the Lord appeared to Catherine very frequently, and remained with her longer than he had been wont to do, and sometimes brought with him his most glorious mother, sometimes St. Dominic, and sometimes both of them: but mostly he came alone and talked with her, as a friend with a most intimate friend; in such sort, that, as she herself secretly and blushinglly confessed to me, the Lord and she frequently recited the Psalms together, walking up and down the chamber, as two monks or priests are wont to recite the service. Oh, marvel! Oh, astonishment! Oh, manifestation of divine familiarity unheard of in our times!" exclaims the biographer: as he truly well might!

Very soon after this, having tried in vain, as she informed her confessor, to learn to read, she one day prayed God, that, if it was His will that she should read, he would teach her at once, to avoid further loss of time in learning. She rose from her knees perfectly well able to read any writing as readily and quickly as any learned man could. This Father Raymond heard her do; but on asking her to spell the words she could not, and did not know the letters; a proof, says the confessor, of the reality of the miracle! In another place it is incidentally mentioned that she read especially the *Psalter*. Does not this, joined to the Dominican's *proof* of the miracle, seem to indicate, that what passed for reading was in fact repeating by heart?

On a subsequent day, in carnival time, while the others in the Saint's family were carousing, and she was alone in her chamber, Christ appeared to her, and

said that he was come to keep his promise of marrying her. Then appeared the Virgin, St. John, St. Paul, and St. Dominic, and David with a harp, on which he played very sweetly. The Virgin then took Catherine's hand in hers, and holding out the fingers towards her son, asked if he would deign to espouse her "in the faith. To which the only begotten Son of God graciously consented, and drew forth a golden ring, with four pearls and a magnificent diamond in it, which ring he placed with his own most holy right hand on the ring-finger of the right hand of Catherine, saying, 'Behold I marry you in the faith to me your Creator and Saviour.'" After adding some further exhortations, the vision disappeared; but as a proof of its reality, there remained the ring on the finger of Catherine! It was not indeed visible to any eyes but those of the Saint herself, adds Father Raymond with perfect composure and contentment; but she saw it, inasmuch as she has many times confessed to me, though with many blushes, that she always continued to see the ring on her finger, and was never long without looking at it.

One day while she was praying to God to *renew her heart*, Christ suddenly appeared to her—or, in the words of the biographer, her eternal spouse came to her as usual—opened her side, removed her heart, and carried it away with him. So truly was this done, that for several days she declared herself to be without any heart, pointing out to those who objected that it was impossible, that with God nothing is impossible. After some days Christ again appeared, bearing in his hand what seemed a human heart, red and shining, again opened her side, put the new heart in, and closed the aperture, saying, "See, dearest

daughter; as I took from you the other day your heart, so now I will give you mine, with which you will always live!" And as a proof of the miracle, there remained evermore in her side the scar, as she herself and her female companions had often assured Father Raymond. A further confirmation of the fact was moreover to be seen in the remarkable circumstance, that from that day forth, the saint was unable to say, as she had been wont, "Lord, I commend to thee my heart," but always said, "Lord, I commend to thee thy heart."

Another time the first person of the Trinity appeared to her "in a vision," and she seemed to see him pull from out his mouth our Saviour Christ in his human form. Then he pulled from out his breast St. Dominic, and said to her, "Dearest daughter, I have begotten these two sons, the one by natural generation, the other by sweet and loving adoption." Then the Almighty enters into a detailed comparison between Christ and St. Dominic, and ends by saying, that the figure of the latter had now been shown her "because he resembled much the body of my most holy naturally begotten and only son."

Once when she was carrying some comforts to a sick poor woman, Christ, "joking with her," suddenly made the things so heavy that she could hardly carry them. Then, when she wished to leave the sick woman, still jesting, he took from her the power of moving. Being troubled, therefore, and yet at the same time smiling, she said to her heavenly spouse, who was jesting with her, "Why, dearest husband, have you thus tricked me? Does it seem to you well to keep me here, and thus mock and confuse me?" She adds more remonstrances of this sort, and at last, "the eternal husband

seeing the secret annoyance of his wife, and not being in a manner able to endure it, he restored to her her previous strength."

Upon another occasion, when she was at her devotions in the church of the Dominicans, a poor beggar, *who appeared to be about thirty-two or thirty-three years old*, implored her to bestow on him some clothing. The Saint bade him wait a minute; and returning into a private chapel, she drew off by the feet, "cautiously and modestly," says Father Raymond, an under garment without sleeves, which she wore under her outer clothing because of the cold, and very gladly gave it to the poor man. Upon which the beggar replied, "Madonna, since you have furnished me with a woollen garment, I pray you to provide me with one of linen also." To which she willingly consented, saying, "Follow me, and I will readily give you what you ask." So she returned to her father's house, followed by the poor man, and going into a store room, where the linen clothing of her father and brothers was kept, she took a shirt and pair of drawers and joyfully gave them to him. But he, when he had got these, did not desist from begging, saying, "Madonna, what can I do with this garment, which has no sleeves to cover the arms. I beg you to give me some sleeves of some sort, that so my whole clothing may be your gift." Upon this, Catherine, not the least displeased with his importunity, searched all over the house to find some sleeves to give him. And finding by chance, hanging on a peg, a new gown belonging to the servant, which she had never yet worn, she instantly stripped the sleeves from it, and gave them to the beggar. But he, when he had taken them, still persevered, saying, "See now, Madonna, you have clothed me, for which may He reward

you, for love of whom you have done it. But I have a companion in the hospital, who is in extreme want of clothing. If you will give him some garment, I would willingly carry it to him from you." Upon which, Catherine, in no wise displeased at the poor man's reiterated demands, or cooled in the fervour of her charity, bethought her how she could find some clothing to send to the poor man in the hospital. But, in the words of the biographer monk, "remembering that all the family, except her father, disapproved of her almsgiving, and kept all they had under lock and key, to prevent her from giving the things away to the poor, and further discreetly considering that she had taken away enough from the servant, who was herself poor, and therefore ought not to have everything taken from her, she found that her resources were confined wholly to herself. She, therefore, seriously discussed in her mind the question, whether she ought to give the poor wretch the only garment which remained to her. Charity argued for the affirmative; but maidenly modesty opposed a negative. And in this contest charity was overcome by charity. That is to say, the charity which pities the bodies of our neighbour, was conquered by the charity which regards their souls; since Catherine considered that great scandal would arise if she were to go naked, and that souls ought not to be scandalised for the sake of any alms to the body." Accordingly, she told the beggar, that she would willingly have given him that, her only covering, if it had been lawful to do so—but that it was not permissible. "I know," said he, smiling, "that you would give me anything you could. Adieu!" And so he went. On the following night, however, Christ came to her, holding in his hand the garment she had given

the poor man, now all adorned with pearls and gems, and said, "Dost thou know this gown? Thou gavest it to *me* yesterday, and charitably clothedst me when I was naked, saving me from the pain of cold and shame. Now I will give thee from my sacred body a garment, which, though invisible to men, shall preserve both thy body and soul from cold." So saying, he pulled from out the wound in his side a garment of the colour of blood, exceedingly resplendent, and clothed her with it. And, in fact, so perfectly did it fulfil, though invisible, the purpose for which it was given, that the Saint never afterwards wore any under garment, either in summer or winter, nor did she ever more suffer from the cold.

It occurred frequently, that the most hardened sinners were reclaimed by her intervention, but not by the means of exhortation or persuasion—(in this there would have been nothing worth telling)—but by direct application to God, and asking the required conversion as a favour to herself. There was a certain inveterate reprobate in Siena, who having led an exceedingly wicked life, was near his death, and obstinately refused to confess, or humble himself in any way. "Fallen into final impenitence, he continually committed that sin against the Holy Ghost, which is not forgiven either in this world, or the world to come, and thus deservedly was going down to eternal torments," says Father Raymond. In short, if he had lived anywhere but in Siena, or if his parish priest had not bethought him of applying to Catherine in the difficulty, he would infallibly have perished eternally. But what luck some people have! Catherine, on being applied to, undertook the case immediately, but found it a rather more difficult one than usual; for, on

praying to Christ to rescue the dying sinner, he answered her by saying, "The iniquities of this man, horrible blasphemer as he is, have risen up to heaven. Not only has he blasphemed with his mouth me and my saints, but he has even thrown into the fire a picture, in which was my image, and that of my mother, and others of my saints. It is, therefore just that he should burn in eternal fire. Let him alone, my dearest daughter, for he is worthy of death." Catherine, however, replied with many arguments, given at length by her biographer; but, nevertheless, for a long time she could not prevail. From five in the evening till the morning, Catherine, watching and tearful, disputed with the Lord for the salvation of that soul, he alleging the sinner's many and grave sins, which justice required to be punished, and she insisting on the mercy, for the sake of which he had become incarnate. At last the Saint conquered, and at dawn of day Christ said, "Dearest daughter, I have granted your prayer, and I will now convert this man, for whom you pray so fervently." So from that hour all went well. The sinner began to confess, the priest began to absolve him, and he died within a few hours. But it was a very near run thing. For the priest who had applied to Catherine had found on reaching her house, that she was in a trance or ecstasy, and could not be spoken with. He waited as long as he could, and when he could wait no longer, he left a message with a companion of Catherine's to the desired effect. As it was, all went well. But it is clear that if a few hours more had been lost, if the Saint's trance had lasted longer, or her long argument on the subject had not been concluded when it was, or if the woman with whom the message was left, had made any blunder about the

matter, or forgotten it, the man's evil life would have produced its natural consequences according to God's eternal law, and he would have been damned.

It has been suggested by some, eager to exercise the candour which can see whatever of excellence there may be in every system, that the many stories of Catherine's successful efforts to convert the most hardened sinners, are a proof of her having possessed that confidence in the latent good in every human heart which is one of the best results of a truly philosophic faith in God; and which would in truth go far to show that her heart unconsciously, if not her intellect consciously, had placed her in advance of the ethics and theology of her day. But the story just related fatally destroys any such agreeable theory. The conversion of the sinner was to be achieved not by any human action on his heart, but by wholly different means. The Saint did not even seek to see or speak with him. The conversion was to be a miracle, worked as a special favour granted to her. The dying sinner's moral capabilities had nothing whatever to do with the matter.

There is another even more remarkable instance in which the Saint prevails with God to work a miracle, which He declares at the time to be hurtful to the person who is the subject of it. Catherine's mother, Lapa, was dying, but was most unwilling to die. Her daughter, therefore, prayed that her health might be restored to her, but was answered that it was better for Lapa that she should leave this life then. With this answer she returns to her mother, and endeavours to reconcile her to the necessity of then dying, but in vain. Thus the Saint became mediator between the Lord and her mother, supplicating the one not to take

Lapa out of the world against her will, and exhorting the other to be resigned to the disposition of the Lord. But Catherine, who with her prayers, constrained, as it were, the Omnipotent, could not, by her exhortation, bend the weak mind of her mother. So the Lord said to his wife, "Tell your mother that if she will not leave the body now, the time will come when she shall greatly desire death, and not be able to find it." Lapa, however, could not make up her mind to die, nor would she confess in preparation for death; and, accordingly, died unshriven. Then her daughter cried to God, and said, "Oh, Lord God! are these then the promises you made me, that no one of this house should perish? * * * * * And now I see my mother dead without the sacraments of the church! By thy infinite mercy I pray thee, do not let me be defrauded in such a manner! Nor will I move hence for an instant as long as I live, until thou shalt render back my mother to life." So God, although he knew that it was bad for her mother, recalled her again to life; and she lived to be eighty-nine years old, surviving all her numerous children, tried by much adversity, and often longing for that death which she had before so unwisely rejected.

One of the most remarkable miraculous events which occurred to her was the following, related by Father Raymond as having happened at Pisa in his presence. Catherine had received the sacrament, and was, as usual with her at such times, in a trance. Her confessor and some others were awaiting her recovery from it, when they saw her suddenly rise with a start to a kneeling posture, with her arms stretched out horizontally, and in a minute or two more fall prostrate. Soon afterwards she came out of her trance, and imme-

diately calling aside her confessor, said, "Be it known to you, my father, that I now bear on my body the marks of the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ." "And I," says the monk, "having told her that I had observed as much from the movements of her body while she was in her trance, asked her in what manner the Lord had performed that miracle? And she said, 'I saw the crucified Lord descending towards me with a great light, which caused me, from the impetus of my soul to meet its Creator, to raise up my body, then I saw five bloody rays descending from the scars of his most holy wounds, and directing themselves to the hands and feet and heart of my body. Upon which, knowing what the mystery was, I exclaimed, "O Lord my God, let not, I pray you, the scars appear externally on my body; it is enough for me to have them internally." Then, while I was yet speaking, the rays, before they reached me, turned from blood-colour to a pure and splendid light, and touched the five parts of my body, that is, my hands, my feet, and my heart.' I asked her further, 'Do you now feel in those spots any sensible pain?' To which, with a deep sigh, she replied, 'So great is the pain I feel in all those five places, but especially in my heart, that it appears impossible to me to live many days, unless the Lord perform some further miracle.'"

To appreciate the importance and bearing of this miracle, the fierce and bitter rivalry which existed between the Dominicans and Franciscans must be borne in mind. St. Francis had received these five wounds, the counterpart of Christ's wounds, in the same way. The marks are familiarly known among hagiographers and their readers as the *stigmata*, and the having received them was the crowning glory of

St. Francis, and the proud and exclusive boast of his Franciscans: and now the Dominicans were even with them. The Sienese Pope, who canonized Catherine, Pius II., gave his approbation to a service, in which this reception of the *stigmata* was prominently asserted. And so severely was the blow felt by the indignant Franciscans, that they obtained from the next Pope but one, Sixtus the Fourth, himself a member of their Order, a decree to the effect that St. Francis had an exclusive right to, and monopoly of that special miracle, and that it was accordingly forbidden to represent St. Catherine receiving the *stigmata* under pain of ecclesiastical censures!

Whether the opposition monk, Sixtus, intended by this decree to assert that no such miracle was performed on Catherine, or that it ought not to have been performed in justice to St. Francis, or that having been unfortunately performed, nothing ought to be said about it, is left to the very unsatisfactory conjectures of indiscreet inquirers.

The tendency observable in many of the austerities and miracles related of St. Catherine, to outdo the austerities and miracles of other saints, is especially remarkable in this of the *stigmata*. The degree in which it served the purpose of the Dominicans, is the measure of the suspicion attaching to it. But as there is nothing incredible in the supposition that Catherine may have imagined all she related in her trance, so it is by no means unlikely that such diseased dreamings may have been the natural product of a waking fancy filled with, and dwelling on this much envied manifestation. Perhaps the condition so providently introduced, as it seems, that the scars were not to be visible, may be suggestive of a fraudulent intention. But, on

the other hand, it should seem, that if fraud had been planned, it would have been very easy, for one who subjected her body to so much self-inflicted torment, to submit to the required wounds before-hand.

In another instance there seems to be emulation of a higher model. Wishing to give wine away to the poor against the desire of her family, she miraculously causes a barrel to become for a long while inexhaustible, the wine drawn from it being, at the same time, of a much superior quality to that originally put into it.

Many details are recorded of her ministry to the sick; but, strangely enough, the most prominent circumstances in each case, are those which go to prove her readiness to encounter whatever was most loathsome; and some of the particulars of her victories over the natural repugnances of mind and body in this respect—often of a nature in no wise conducive to, or connected with the well-being of her patient—are far too revolting for reproduction on any English page.

The reader has now an abundant—perhaps he may think a superfluously abundant—specimen of that part of Catherine's history which the Church most loves to preserve, contemplate, and enlarge on, and of the kind of teaching she draws from it—draws from it, be it again observed, for this is an important part of the subject—at this present day.

The morality set forth by example in the tales of the Saint abstracting the property of her relatives to give it to any mendicant who begged of her, is more largely and accurately reduced to systematic precept in the "Manual for Confessors," now in use as the rule for those who have the guidance of the popular conscience. It is there laid down, that a wife

or son may "take" from the goods of a husband or father, who will not give for the purpose, what is requisite for "good works!"

The stories which represent the Creator as capriciously reversing his decrees with the unconscientious levity of an earthly potentate ruled by an exacting favourite, and inflicting undeserved torment and miserable death in accordance with the suggestions of evil passions wholly fiend-like, are still shaping the Italian peasant's conception of the Almighty, and thus poisoning the master well-head of all spiritual and moral amelioration.

The depravation, or rather the annihilation of the natural conscience, which necessarily results from attributing fearful sinfulness to trifling and absurd omissions and inadvertences, and from installing an admiration for useless, and often mischievous practices on the throne, which should be occupied in the human soul by reverence for man's homely duties, and homely affections, is still doing its appointed work as busily and as surely as it did five hundred years ago, and has been doing ever since,—with what results, we see.

But it is sufficient to have indicated to the reader the importance, from this point of view, of this story of a Saint, who, alas! but too truly "being dead, yet speaketh." It would require an analysis extending over the whole field of national character, to trace all the ramified evil produced by the views of God and man involved in such stories as those related in the preceding pages. And if there were no other reason against here attempting such an essay, it might assuredly be urged, that such considerations have no place in a chapter devoted to the Church view of the case.

CHAPTER V.

ST. CATHERINE AS AN AUTHOR.

THE literary phase of Catherine's career and character, especially as seen in her letters, is by no means its least curious and suggestive aspect. The indications of what she herself was, and yet more, the evidences obtainable from them of the undeniably exceptional and extraordinary position she held among her contemporaries, are valuable, and yet at the same time not a little puzzling.

Her works consist of a treatise occupying a closely printed quarto volume, which Father Raymond describes as "a Dialogue between a Soul, which asked four questions of the Lord, and the same Lord, who made answer, and gave instruction in many most useful truths;" of her letters, three hundred and seventy-three in number; and of twenty-six prayers.

This Dialogue is entitled, "The book of Divine Doctrine, given in person by God the Father, speaking to the mind of the most glorious and holy Virgin, Catherine of Siena, and written down as she dictated it in the vulgar tongue, she being the while entranced, and actually hearing that which God spoke in her." It is stated to have been dictated by the Saint in her father's house in Siena, a little before she went to Rome, and to have been completed the 13th of October, 1378. This dialogue has been divided into

five parts, though no such division existed in it, as it fell from her lips. The first part treats of Discretion; the second of Prayer; the third of the Divine Providence; the fourth of Obedience; and the fifth of Consummate Perfection. The four first exist in manuscript in the original Italian, as they were taken down from the lips of the entranced Saint; though these ancient manuscript copies abound, we are told by the modern editor of them, Girolamo Gigli, with such errors as frequently not only to alter the sense, but to render it inconsistent with true orthodoxy. Of course nothing but the purest doctrine could have been uttered by the Saint, and these dangerous errors have been corrected. But the fifth treatise is not extant in the original, but only in Father Raymond's Latin translation of it, from which the published Italian version has been re-translated.

The French oratorian, Father Casimir Oudin,* in his Supplement of Ecclesiastical writers, omitted by Bellarmine, quietly says, "She wrote, or Raymond de Vineis wrote in her name, a work inscribed," &c. &c. It is very possible, that the Frenchman's suspicion may be just. But, with the exception of some allusions and subtleties, indicating, perhaps, a greater acquaintance with scholastic theology than the Saint may be thought to have possessed, there is nothing in the work itself to belie the origin attributed to it. It could not, indeed, have been written down from the Saint's dictation, as it professes to have been, in the form and sequence in which we have it printed; because it is intermingled (without any typographical or other advertisement, that the reader is about to

* Supplement. di Script. Eccl., p. 649. Paris, 1686.

enter on matter of a different authorship and pretensions)—with long passages descriptive of the Saint's mode of receiving the revelation, written in the person of the secretary, and bearing a strong likeness to Father Raymond's style and phraseology. But the Saint's own utterances are exactly such as might have been expected from such a patient, and much resemble in many respects those which many readers have probably heard in these latter days, from persons in all likelihood similarly affected in greater or less degree. As the latter have often been found to bear a singular resemblance in quality and manner to the verbose and repetitive inanities of some very slenderly gifted extempore preacher, so these ecstatic outpourings of St. Catherine are like the worst description of the pulpit eloquence of her day and country. Low and gross as the taste and feeling of the age were, especially in matters spiritual and theological, it is difficult to imagine that Catherine could have gained any part of the great reputation and influence she undeniably exercised in high places from this production. The reader may see from the following passage, taken quite at haphazard from its pages, whether his impression on this point agrees with that of the writer.

Catherine dictates these sentences as hearing them word for word as she repeats them, from the mouth of God!

"Know, O daughter! that no one can escape from my hands, because I am He, who I am; and ye do not exist by yourselves, but only in so far as ye are created by Me, who am the Creator of all things that have existence, except only Sin, which does not exist, and therefore has not been created by me. And because it

is not in me, it is not worthy of being loved. And therefore the Creature offends, because he loves that which he ought not to love, which is sin, and hates Me, whom he is bound and obliged to love ; for I am supremely good, and have given him existence by the so ardent fire of my love. But from Me men cannot escape. Either they fall into my hands for justice on their sins, or they fall into my hands for mercy. Open therefore the eyes of your mind, and look at my hand, and you will see that what I have said to you is the truth." *Then she raising her eyes in obedience to the supreme Father, "saw enclosed in his hand the entire universe," &c., &c.**

It is evident, that this could not have been written from the Saint's dictation. But the work may have been composed from notes taken down while she poured forth her trance-talk. And such an hypothesis would not be incompatible with Oudin's supposition, that the book, as we have it, was composed by Father Raymond. In any case the staple of its contents, if not inferior to the generality of the theological literature of the time, shows at least no such superiority to it as to place the author in the high and exceptional position Catherine is proved to have occupied.

Twenty-six prayers have been preserved among the works of Saint Catherine ; and it might be supposed, that such a record of the secret outpourings of an ardent heart in its communion with the infinite God, sole object of its fervent aspirations and daily and nightly meditations, would have been calculated to throw considerable light on the character, capabilities, and mental calibre of the worshipper. But these

* Dialogo, etc. Op. di Son Cat., vol. iv. p. 30.

documents afford no glimpse of any such insight. They are not the sort of utterances that could ever bring one human heart nearer to another: and no assimilating power of sympathy will enable the reader of them to advance one jot towards a knowledge of the heart from which they proceeded. The impression they are calculated to produce, is either that the Saint was a self-conscious actor and pretender, or that they are not her compositions. And the latter, perhaps, may be considered the more probable hypothesis.

Though addressed in form to the Deity, there is little that can be accurately called prayer. The speaker, or writer rather, seems continually to forget his avowed object, and runs off into long statements of the nature and attributes of the Deity, and ecclesiastical propositions based thereon, evidently prompted rather by didactic views on mortal hearers, than by effort to hold communion with the Almighty. It is all dry, cold, repetitive, verbose theology, instead of the spontaneous warm utterances of either a thankful or a contrite heart;—neither the expression of an earnest spirit, nor the production of an eloquent writer.

There remain the letters, by far the most interesting and valuable of the Saint's reputed works. They are 373 in number, and form two stout quarto volumes of the Lucca edition. In the four octavo volumes of the cheap Milan reprint before mentioned, only the first 198 are given; though there is no word of notice or explanation to indicate, that the work is not complete. On the contrary, the fourth volume is entitled "fourth and last;" and we are left to the hopeful conjecture, that the devout editors found the speculation so bad a one commercially, that they thought fit to close the publication suddenly, and leave their subscribers to

discover as late as might be, that they had purchased an imperfect book.

The 373 letters of the entire collection have among them many addressed to kings, popes, cardinals, bishops, conventual bodies, and political corporations, as well as a great number written to private individuals. And it seems strange, that among so many correspondents of classes, whose papers are likely to be preserved, and many of whom, especially the monastic communities, would assuredly have attached a high value to such documents, no one original of any of these letters should have been preserved.

Girolamo Gigli, the editor of the quarto edition of the Saint's works, printed at Lucca and Siena, in 1707—13, an enthusiastic and laborious investigator and collector of every description of information regarding her, gives in his Preface to the letters, a careful account of the manuscript collections from which they have at different times been printed, but has not a word to say of any scrap of original document. "As soon," he writes, "as the saintly Virgin had ascended to heaven in the year 1380, some of her secretaries and disciples collected from one place and another some of her letters and writings." But the words which follow this seem to indicate that even these earliest collectors did not possess any of the original manuscripts, but made copies of them, in most cases probably from other copies. "The blessed Stefano Maconi," he says, "having transcribed the book of the Dialogue, added at the end of it some epistles; and another larger collection was made, also by him as I think, in a certain volume which exists in the library of the Certosa at Pavia. Buonconti also collected not a few, as may be seen by an ancient copy

in his writing, which was among the most notable things left by the Cardinal Volunnio Bandinelli, and now belongs to the Signor Volunnio, his nephew and heir. We have another abundant collection in an ancient manuscript preserved in the library of St. Pantaleo at Rome; and this is one of the most faithful of all those I have seen in its orthography and style; and as far as can be judged by the character of the writing, the scribe must have been contemporary with the Saint. But the blessed Raymond of Capua, her confessor, left to the Dominicans of Siena two very large volumes of her letters neatly copied out on parchment, in which nearly all those collected by the others are contained. And these most precious documents are rendered more valuable by the testimony given to their authenticity by the blessed Tomaso Caffarini in the above cited reports made at Venice.”*

The epistles were first printed by Aldus in 1500, just 180 years after Catherine's death, and afterwards in many other editions, all, according to Gigli, exceedingly incorrect, and requiring much critical care both in the restoration of the text to its original Tuscan purity, and in the arrangement of the letters, as far as possible, in their due chronological order. This, however, is made subsidiary in Gigli's edition to a division of them according to the persons to whom they were addressed. Thus those to the two Popes, Gregory XI. and Urban VI., come first; then those written to cardinals; then those to bishops and other ecclesiastical authorities; and lastly those to private individuals.

And this is the substance of all the Sienese editor

* The report of the investigation, which took place on occasion of her canonization, in 1411. This Caffarini was one of her disciples.

has to tell us respecting the texts, manuscript and printed, on which his own has been formed. But the Saint's confessor, and one or two of her disciples, have recorded some circumstances respecting the lost originals of these letters which require to be noticed.

It is stated in perfect accordance with all probability, that Catherine had never learned to read or write, as was in those days the case with the great majority of women in stations of life far superior to her own. Her biographer's account of her miraculously acquiring the power of reading by sudden endowment has been related in the preceding chapter. And at a later period of her life we are told that she similarly acquired the power of writing, "in order that she might be able," writes Girolamo Gigli in his Preface to the Letters, "to carry out the office of her apostolate by more agencies than one, and in more places than one, at the same time, Christ gave her by a wonderful method the use of the pen, in the short schooling of a trance, and by the teaching of St. John the Evangelist, and of the blessed Doctor, Aquinas, as the Saint herself affirms in a letter to the above-mentioned blessed Raymond her confessor."

One of the most interesting points of inquiry in the life of St. Catherine turns on the question, more fully examined in a subsequent chapter, how far was she, or was she not, entirely sincere in her statements and pretensions. Now if she makes the statement attributed to her respecting her acquisition of the art of writing, it must be concluded that she was guilty of wilful imposture. No possible self-deception could have misled her as to the fact of her previous ignorance of writing, and as little as to that of her writing after the trance. It will be well therefore to observe accurately

what she really does say herself upon the subject. In 1377, when she was in the thirtieth year of her age, after her return from Avignon, and before her final journey to Rome, she was inhabiting a villa belonging to the noble Sienese family of Salimbeni, situated on an isolated eminence overlooking the road to Rome, and called "Rocca d'Orcia." Hence she wrote a very long letter—the longest probably in the whole collection—occupying, as it does, twelve full octavo pages—to Father Raymond; and concludes it with the following lines.

"This letter, and another which I sent you, I have written with my own hand from this isolated fortress, with many sighs and abundance of tears, so that seeing with my eyes, I did not see. But I was full of admiration at myself, and at the goodness of God, considering his mercy towards creatures, who have reason in them, and his providence, which abounded upon me, giving and providing me with the aptitude for writing for my comfort, I having been deprived of that consolation, which by reason of my ignorance I knew not. So that on descending from the height (does this mean 'on coming out of my trance,' or 'on leaving this fortress?') I might have some little vent for the feelings of my heart, so that it should not burst. Not being willing to take me as yet out of this darksome life, God formed it in my mind in a wonderful manner, as the master does to the child, to whom he gives an exemplar. So that, as soon as ever he was gone from me, together with the glorious Evangelist John, and Thomas Aquinas, sleeping I began to learn."

Now the entire value of this incident in the eyes of the fourteenth, and the entire incredibility of it in the eyes of the nineteenth century, and consequently its

stringency as evidence against the sincerity of St. Catherine, depends on the length of time intervening between the moment when she began to learn in her sleep, and that at which she first wrote. All her own admiration of herself and of God's providence in the matter, all her own belief in miracle, and her beginning to learn in her sleep, we may admit without founding thereon any impeachment of her sincerity. Nor need we be accurate in taking the sense of her statement, that she then *began* to learn. Most people would find it difficult to say when they began to learn most things. And on the other hand the phrase would seem to express, that she did not *complete* her learning to write in that same trance. We have other indications also of a gradual advance in the art. The long letter, in which the Saint makes the above statement, is certainly not the first product of her new acquirement. She speaks of having written a former letter to the same correspondent. But neither was that her first writing.

In the evidence given by the Beato Tomaso Caffarini on the occasion of the examination of her pretensions to canonization, he deposes: "I further testify, that I heard from Master Stephen,* of Siena, by means of letters from him, how that this Virgin, after that she miraculously learned to write, rising up from prayer with a desire of writing, wrote with her own hand a *little* letter (*litterulam*), which she sent to the said Master Stephen, and in which was the following conclusion, written, that is to say, in her own vernacular: "Know, my son, that this is the first letter, which I ever wrote;"—much such a first attempt as the most

* This was the Beato Stefano Maconi, one of the amanuenses of the Saint.

unmiraculously taught of penmen might be likely to make.

Consistently then with all that Catherine distinctly asserts on the subject, we may believe, that despite her ready credence of her own environment with the supernatural at every moment of her life, the only miracle on the occasion of her newly acquired power of writing was worked by that intensely strong will, which works so many miracles in this world, and which all Catherine's history shows her to have eminently possessed.

The same witness further testifies that the above-mentioned Stephen informed him that Catherine had after that frequently written in his presence both letters and some sheets of the book* she composed in the vulgar tongue, all which writings he—Stephen—had preserved in the Carthusian convent of Pontignano near Siena, over which he presided. And there, according to Girolamo Gigli, "they were known to have been in existence for many years, until, not long ago," says he, writing in 1707, "they were transported to Grenoble, at the time when the monks of Pontignano, as well as all those of the Carthusian order, were obliged to send all their papers to the Grande Chartreuse." And so they vanish out of our sight.

Further Caffarini testifies, that he saw and had in his own possession at Venice a prayer, written miraculously, as he says, by Catherine, with a piece of cinnabar, immediately on waking from a trance; meaning, apparently, that trance, during which she obtained the faculty of writing. He gives the prayer in Latin prose. But Gigli says that it ought to be

* The Dialogue, of which an account has been given.

written in the Tuscan as verse, in the manner in which it is printed by Crescimbeni in the third volume of his "Volgare Poesia," as follows :—

" O Spirito santo, vieni nel mio cuore ;
 Per la tua potenza trailo a te, Dio :
 E concedemi carità con timore.
 Custodimi Christo da ogni mal pensiero,
 Riscaldami e rinfiammami del tuo dolcissimo amore,
 Sicche ogni pena mi paja leggiere.
 Santo il mio padre, e dolce il mio Signore,
 Ora ajutami in ogni mio mestiere,
 Christo amore, Christo amore."

This writing, in cinnabar, Caffarini declares is "now," 1411, in the Dominican nunnery at Venice. But this also has shared the ill fortune which seems to have attended every scrap of the Saint's writing. For Gigli states that all his efforts to obtain any tidings of it in his own time had been in vain.

A few other letters are recorded to have been written by her own hand, especially one to Pope Urban. But it is admitted, that the great bulk of the letters were written by her secretaries, of whom she seems to have kept three regularly employed, besides occasionally using the assistance of several other of her companions and disciples. A few of the letters are recorded to have been dictated by her, when in a state of trance or extasy; but there is nothing in either their matter or manner to distinguish them from the rest. Whatever may have been the true physical characteristics of these trances, it is perfectly clear, that the mind which dictated the letters in question, was pursuing the habitual tenor of its daily thoughts, neither obscured nor intensified by the condition of the body. They are neither more nor less argumentative, neither more nor less eloquent, than the others of the collection.

And it seems strange, that the same state of abstraction from all bodily clog or guidance, which so often left her mind impressionable by visions and hallucinations having to her all the vivid reality of material events, should on other occasions have been compatible with the conduct of mental operations, in no respect differing from those of her ordinary waking state. But it is to be observed, that the authority on which it is stated, that these letters were dictated by the Saint in a state of extasy, is only that of her amanuenses; and that, admitting them to have been of perfect good faith in the matter, nothing is more probable, than that, all agape, as they were ever for fresh wonders, and evidences of Saintship, any trifling circumstance, such as long continuance in the same attitude, or closed eyes, may have been considered sufficient evidence of trance.

The very high reputation, and that not altogether of a pietistic or ecclesiastical nature, which this large mass of writings has enjoyed for several centuries has appeared to the present writer an extremely singular fact. It will justify him however in occupying some pages, and the reader's attention with a translation* of one of the most esteemed of the collection. Be it what it may, it can hardly be otherwise than interesting to any reader to see a specimen of compositions, said to have produced so widely spread and important results, and praised by so many men of note; and the means, which it will give him of comparing his impressions of it with those of the writer, will in some degree lessen the diffidence with which the latter must

* The original is also printed at the end of the volume, for the examination of those who might think that the translation unfairly represented its merits.

express an opinion wholly at variance with so large a quantity of high authority.

A great deal of the praise bestowed on St. Catherine's writings by Italian critics has reference to their style and diction. Written at a time when the language, fresh from the hands of Dante, of Petrarch, and of Boccaccio, was still in its infancy, and in a city in all times celebrated for the purity of its vernacular, they they have by the common consent of Italian scholars taken rank as one of the acknowledged classics of the language;—"testa di lingua," as the Tuscan purists say. The Della Crusicans have placed them on the jealously watched list of their authorities; and an enthusiastic Sienese compatriot has compiled a "vocabulario Caterineano," after the fashion of those consecrated to the study of the works of Homer and Cicero. Of course no one from the barbarous side of the Alps can permit themselves any word of observation on this point. Had no such decisive opinion been extant to guide his ignorance, it might probably have seemed to a foreigner, that the Saint's style was loose in its syntax, intricate in its construction, and overloaded with verbosity. But we are bound to suppose, that any such opinion could be formed only by one ignorant of the real beauties of the language: especially as we know how great and minute is the attention paid to diction by Italian critics.

But these philological excellences are after all the least part of the praise that has been lavished on Catherine as an author. Her admirers enlarge on the moving eloquence, the exalted piety, the noble sentiments, the sound argumentation of her compositions, especially her letters. And it is not from an Italian, or a Dominican, but from a French Jesuit and

historian, Papire Masson, that we have the following enthusiastic praise of that letter more especially, which it is intended to submit to the reader of these pages.

“Several epistles are extant,” writes this sixteenth century Frenchman, “from Catherine of Siena to Urban, and one to King Charles V., written on the 6th of May, 1379, to uphold that Pope’s cause. And certainly nothing more weighty or more elegant could have been conceived or written by any man of that time, not even excepting Petrarch, whose genius I admire, and whose works I generally prefer to those of any other writer of that age.”

To the present writer such an opinion appears perfectly monstrous, and wholly unaccountable on any simply literary consideration of the matter. It may be admitted to be no little extraordinary that a poor dyer’s daughter in the fourteenth century should write these letters, such as they are; that she should possess so much knowledge of the general state of Church politics in Europe, as they evince; and most of all that having popes, kings, and cardinals for her correspondents, she should be listened to by them with respect and attention. Even to the Pope, she on more than one occasion ventures on a tone of very decided reproof; and it should seem, that Urban VI., a choleric and violent tempered man, received from her in good part communications couched in language such as rarely reaches Papal ears. “The blessed Christ,” she says, in writing to Urban of the vices of the ecclesiastics, a topic to which she returns again and again, “complains of this, that his Church is not swept clean of vices, and your Holiness has not that solicitude on the subject which you ought to have.” Again, when

there had been riots in Rome, in consequence of the Pope having failed to keep certain promises he had made to the people, she "humbly begs him to take care, prudently to promise only what it will be possible for him to perform in its entirety."

All this is curious enough, and abundantly sufficient to prove that Catherine was an influential power in her generation. It will be the business of a following chapter to offer some suggestions as to the explanation of this remarkable fact. But let the causes of it have been what they may, it is difficult to suppose that they can be found in the persuasive eloquence, or literary merit of her appeals to those in power.

CHAPTER VI.

CATHERINE'S LETTER TO THE KING OF FRANCE.

THE letter selected as a specimen of the vast mass of the Saint's correspondence is perhaps the most specially celebrated of the whole collection. It was to Charles V. of France, on the 6th of May, 1379, on the subject of the favour shown by him to the party of the Anti-pope Clement VII., and runs as follows :—

“Dearest father in sweet Christ Jesus, I Catherine the slave of the servants of Jesus Christ, write to you in his precious blood, with the desire to see in you* a true and entirely perfect light, in order that you may know the truth of that which is necessary to you for your salvation. Without this light, we shall go into darkness ; darkness which will not permit us to discern that which is hurtful to the soul and to the body, from that which is useful to us ; and thus destroys the perceptions of the soul, so that good things are made to seem bad, and bad things good, that is to say, vice. And those things, which lead us to sin, appear to us good and delightful ; and virtue, and that which leads us to virtue, appears to us bitter and of great difficulty. But he, who has light, knows well the truth ; and accordingly loves virtue, and God, who is the cause of all virtue ; and hates vice, and his own sensuality,

* This phrase, “with the desire to see in you,” occurs in the same position and construction in nearly every letter.

which is the cause of all vice. What is it, that takes from us this true and sweet light? The self-love which a man has for his own self, which is a cloud that obscures the eye of the intellect, and hides from the pupil the light of the most holy faith. And thus a man goes as one blind and ignorant, following his own frailty, wholly given up to passion, without the light of reason, even as an animal, which, because it has no reasoning powers, allows itself to be guided by its own sensations. Great pity is it that man, whom God has created in his own image and likeness, should voluntarily by his own fault make himself worse than the brute animal, that like an ungrateful and ignorant creature, neither knows nor acknowledges the benefits of God, but attributes them to himself. From self-love proceeds every evil. Whence come injustice, and all the other faults? From self-love. It commits injustice against God, against itself, against its neighbour, and against Holy Church. Against God it commits injustice, in that it does not render glory and praise to his name, as it ought to do. To itself it does not render hatred and dislike of vice, and love of virtue; nor to its neighbour benevolence; and if it is found in a ruler, it does not do justice to its neighbour, because it does so * only according to the pleasure of human creatures, or for its own natural pleasure.† Nor to the Church does it render obedience, or assistance, but continually persecutes it. All is caused by self-love, which does not permit a man to know the truth,

* I translate literally. The sense would seem to be, "or if it does so, it does so only," &c.

† It is curious to observe the mind perverted by the church doctrine of self-abnegation to such a point as to become incapable of seeing that human nature cannot be more Godlike than when it does justice "for its own natural pleasure."

because he is deprived of light. This is very manifest to us, and we see it, and have proofs in ourselves every day that it is so.

“I would not, dearest father, that this cloud should take the light from you; but I wish that there should be in you that light, which is able to make you know and discern the Truth. It appears to me, from what I hear, that you begin to allow yourself to be guided by the counsel of evil men; and you know, that if one blind one leads another, both fall into the ditch. So will it happen to you, if you do not find some better remedy than what I hear of. It is a matter of great wonder to me, that a Catholic man, who is willing to fear God, and to be manlike, should let himself be guided like a child, and should not see how he leads himself and others into so great ruin, as is the contaminating the light of the most Holy Faith according to the word and counsel of those whom we see to be members of the devil, corrupt trees, whose faults are manifest to us by the poison of heresy they have recently disseminated, saying that Pope Urban VI. is not truly Pope. Open the eye of your mind,* and see that they lie in their throats,† may be put to confusion by their own showing, and be seen to be worthy of heavy punishment, from whatever side we turn ourselves. If we turn to those, who, as they say, elected Urban Pope from fear of the fury of the people, they say what is not the truth, since they, in the first instance, had elected him by an election so canonical and orderly, that never was any other supreme pontiff so elected. They in truth gave out, that they proceeded to

* This phrase, “open the eye of your mind,” occurs with wearisome repetition in Catherine’s writings.

† The expression in the original is, “lie over their heads.”

elect for fear the people should rise, but not that from this fear they elected Bartholomew, Archbishop of Bari, who is now Urban VI. And this much I confess is the truth, and do not deny it. He whom they elected by fear was the Cardinal of St. Peter,* as is evident to every one; but the election of Pope Urban was made in a legitimate manner, as has been said. This election they announced to you, and to us, and to the other rulers of the world, manifesting by their deeds, that which they told us in words, doing reverence to him, that is to say, adoring him as Christ on earth, and crowning him with all solemnity, and by remaking anew the election with great unanimity. From him, as from the supreme Pontiff, they besought favours, and used them. And if it were not true that Urban is Pope, but that he has been elected under the constraint of fear, would not they be worthy eternally of confusion? That the pillars of Holy Church, set up for the spreading of the faith, should for fear of bodily death, be willing to consign themselves and us to eternal death, by showing us as our father one who was not so. And would they not be thieves, taking and using † that which they had no right to use? Indeed, if that were true, which they now say, as true it is not, still Urban VI. is truly Pope. But fools

* That is to say, whom they pretended to have elected, in order to quiet the populace, who insisted on having a Roman Pope. They *did* elect the Archbishop of Bari; but gave out that they had elected the Cardinal of St. Peter, intending that to be believed only till they could leave the Conclave and get into safety.

† The favours, that is to say, begged of Urban, who of course could grant none such, if he were not Pope. It is in truth clear enough, that the excuses of those Cardinals who deserted the party of Urban, were mere afterthoughts. They deemed him truly enough elected, till they found that they had given themselves a severer master than they had reckoned on.

and blinded madmen as they are, they have shown and given to us this truth, and hold a lie for themselves. This truth they confessed so long as his Holiness delayed to correct their vices. But as soon as he began to attack them, and to show that their wicked mode of life was displeasing to him, and that he was minded to put an end to it, they immediately raised their heads. And against whom have they raised them? Against the holy faith. They have acted worse than renegade Christians.

“ Oh! miserable men! They and those who follow them know not their own ruin; for if they knew it, they would seek the Divine aid; they would acknowledge their fault, and not be obstinate as the devils, as devils they in truth appear, and have taken on them the office of such. The office of the devils is to pervert souls from Christ crucified, to withdraw them from the way of the truth, to lead them into lies, and to gather them through pain and through punishment to himself, who is the father of lies, giving them that fate which he has for himself. In like manner these men go subverting the truth which they themselves have given us; and returning to lies, have introduced division into the whole world. And that evil which they have in themselves, that they propose to us. Have we the will to know thoroughly this truth? Let us look now and consider their life and conduct, and what following they have of themselves, who are followers of the vestiges of iniquity; since one devil is not contrary to another, but on the contrary they agree together. And pardon me, dearest father (for such I will consider you, as long as I see you to be a lover of truth, and confounder of lies), for I speak thus, because grief for the damnation of them and of others,

and the desire I have for their salvation, causes me to do so. I say this not in disparagement of them, as God's creatures, but in disparagement of vice and of the heresy which they have sown throughout the world, and of the cruelty of which they are guilty towards themselves, and towards the humble souls that perish by their means, for which they must give an account to the Supreme Judge. For if they had been men having the fear of God, or if not the fear of God, respect for the opinion of the world, they would patiently have borne the worst that Pope Urban could have done to them, or even greater contumely, and would have preferred a thousand deaths to doing what they have done; for to greater shame they cannot come, than to appear to the eyes of mankind schismatics, and heretical despisers of the holy faith. If I look to spiritual and corporeal loss, I see them by heresy deprived of God as regards his mercies, and in the body reasonably deprived of their dignities; and they themselves have done it. If I look to the Divine judgment I see it close upon them, if they do not lift themselves out of this darkness; for every fault is punished, and every good deed is rewarded. It will be hard for them to kick against God, if they possessed the greatest possible human power. God is the supreme strength, which fortifies the weak who confide and trust in Him. And it is the truth; and the truth is that which makes us free. We see that only the truth of the servants of God follows,* and holds this truth of Pope Urban VI., confessing him to be truly Pope, as he is. You will not find a servant of God,

* The construction of this sentence is defective in the original; "truth" in the singular being the nominative case to the two verbs, which are in the plural, as if governed by "servants of God."

who *is* a servant of God, that holds the contrary.* I do not speak of such as wear outside the garment of lambs, but inside are ravenous wolves. And do you suppose that, if this were not the truth, God would endure that His servants should walk in such darkness? He would not endure it. If He endures it in the wicked men of the world, He would not endure it in them; and therefore He has given them the light of His truth, for He is no despiser of holy desires but is the acceptor of them, like a kind and merciful Father as He is. I would that you would call to you such men as these, and cause them to declare this truth to you; and that you would not choose to walk so ignorantly. Let not your private interest move you; for that would be worse in you than in any other. Have pity on the many souls which you cast into the hands of the devils. If you will not do good, at least do not evil; for evil frequently turns more to the hurt of him who does it, than of him whom the doer of it wishes to injure. So much evil comes of it, that by it we lose the grace of God, temporal wealth is consumed, and the death of men follows from it. Alas me! And it does not seem that we† see the light; for the cloud of self-love has taken from us the light, and does not let us see. For this reason we are apt to receive any evil information, that may be given to us against the

* The Saint is wrong here, in matter of fact. More than one recognised saint was of the party of Clement, afterwards definitively judged by the Church to have been an anti-Pope. Burlamacchi is sadly gravelled by this awkward fact, and labours hard in his note on the passage to show that the saints of Clement's party were not warm partisans in his favour; but if *our* saint is right, they must have been damned.

† The context would seem to require "ye" in place of "we" here. I translate the phrase as I find it. Burlamacchi has no remark on the passage.

truth by lovers of themselves. But if we have the light it will not be so ; but with great prudence and holy fear of God, you would be willing to know and investigate this truth by means of men of conscience and knowledge. If you choose, ignorance need not fall upon you, since you have where you are the fountain of knowledge,* which I fear you may lose if you continue in your present course ; and you know well how your kingdom will fare, if they shall be men of good consciences, who will not follow a human will with servile fear, but will maintain the truth. They will declare it to you, and will put your mind and soul at rest. Now act not so any more, most dear Father ! consult your own conscience ; think that you must die, and that you know not when ; put before the eye of your intellect, God and his truth, and not interest, or love of country ; for as regards God, we ought not to make any difference between one country and another, since we all proceed from His holy mind, are created in His image and likeness, and redeemed by the precious blood of His only-begotten Son. I am certain that if you have light you will do this, and will not wait for time, for time does not wait for you ; and will invite them† to return to their holy and true obedience, but otherwise not. And for this reason I said that I desired to see in you a true and perfect light, in order that with the light you may recognise and love and fear the truth. My soul will then be made happy by your safety, at seeing you come out from so great an error. I say to you nothing further. Remain in the

* She alludes to the Sorbonne.

† That is, the French cardinals, who took part against Urban. It should seem as if some such phrase as "tolerate them" were left out after the words "otherwise not."

holy and sweet love of God. Pardon me if I have been too heavy on you with my words. My desire for your safety urges me to say them to you by my mouth in your* presence, rather than by writing. May God fill you with His most sweet grace. Jesus is sweet; Jesus is love.”†

Such is the composition pronounced to be unsurpassed for weight of reasoning and eloquence, and to be equal to the writings of Petrarch! Can it be supposed that, putting out of the question any influence exercised by the character of the writer, any human mind was ever persuaded to do or to think anything by such an address? As argument it is surely worse than in any other point of view. With the exception of the passage pointing out the insincerity of the cardinals who raised objections to the election of Urban, there were perhaps never strung together so many absurdly glaring instances of begging the question. And as for rhetorical power, surely in this waste of pleonastic phrases, redundant tautology, and trite common-place hack-preacher's topics, there is no faintest trace even of that untaught eloquence which strong feeling and earnest conviction are apt to command.

And yet looking at the matter in hand from the fourteenth century point of view, what a subject it was to call forth an awful and heart-stirring appeal! If a true Pope be anything, how tremendous and infinitely horrible a phenomenon must an Anti-pope be. Think of the adulteration of the infallible with the

* Burlamacchi remarks, that this passage seems to indicate that Catherine had an intention of going to Paris.

† This last phrase forms the conclusion of every one of the Saint's letters.

fallible, of the doubts engendered, where certainty is imperatively needed, of the sacraments nullified, and the one half of sacred Christendom cheated into eternal perdition, as the necessary result of void ordinations, void baptisms, and void absolutions, and think for a moment how Petrarch, or still better how Dante, would have written on such a subject!

But Catherine must have sincerely believed that her utterances were the utterances of inspiration, and must necessarily have effect as such. For that she bestowed on this long and important letter none of the ordinary care and labour which such a composition would naturally claim from a merely human author, is curiously shown by the record which has preserved the fact, that the Saint dictated three other long letters on the same 6th of May on which she composed this! It is recorded also that she occasionally dictated as many as three letters to three secretaries at the same time. Her biographer and commentators consider the excessive outpouring of words one of the most remarkable proofs of her supernatural claims and powers. And more sceptical minds may admit it as at least a proof of wonderful energy, and indomitable strength of volition.

CHAPTER VII.



DUPE OR IMPOSTOR?

THE official accredited story of this undoubtedly extraordinary and exceptional woman contains, as has been sufficiently seen, a large number of statements, which probably every reader of these pages will, without hesitation, pronounce to be false. Many of the events stated to have happened undoubtedly never did happen; but the question will still remain, how large a portion of the tale must be deemed fraudulent fiction by those who cannot believe things to have happened which contradict the known laws of nature. And when this shall have been answered as satisfactorily as may be under the difficult circumstances of the investigation, it will yet remain to be decided *who* is to be deemed to have been guilty of fraud.

Before entering on these questions, it may be just suggested to the reader,—as a caution to be borne in mind, not as a point intended to be dwelt on in considering the matter,—that we are perhaps not altogether so well aware what *are* the laws of nature in the case of persons afflicted as Catherine was, as some of us are apt to imagine.

Looking at the matter, however, from the most ordinary points of view, it may perhaps be found, that as regards Catherine herself, it is not so necessary to

consider her an impostor, as it may at first sight of the matter appear.

Of the austerities, mortifications, and abstinences recounted, all perhaps may be admitted to have been possible,—especially bearing in mind that Catherine's life was neither a long nor a healthy one—except the fasting for years, and the sleeping only one quarter-of-an-hour per diem. As to the fasting, it is mentioned incidentally in another part of Father Raymond's book, that she was sustained only by the sacramental bread, which she seems to have been in the habit of taking daily. May it not be possible, that the idea of her living without food, may have been generated by some talk of hers, in quite her usual strain, of this Holy Eucharist being her only nourishment, etc., etc., meaning spiritual nourishment? But then was Father Raymond deceived by any such expressions? Did he really believe that she lived for years without taking food? For in his account, no mistake of meaning is possible. He, at all events, intends his readers to believe the simple fact in its naked absurdity.

As for the sleep, it may be remarked that in the case of a person subject to daily trances and states of insensibility, it is very difficult to say how many hours are passed in sleep, and what is sleep, and what not.

In the next place, all the relations of visions seen in "extasy," and of conversations held, and sensations suffered during them, may—due consideration being given to what we know of the patient—be accepted as not only possible but exceedingly probable. And this category will comprise the greatest part of the whole budget of wonders. Even in those cases, in which an abiding evidence of what had happened to her in trance is said to have remained appreciable only by

her own senses, as in the case of the marriage ring, and the pain after the infliction of the stigmata; those most able to form an opinion on such matters, will not think, probably, that it is attributing too much to the imagination of a cataleptic patient, living on raw vegetables, wholly without active occupation, and engrossed by a series of highly exciting thoughts on one ever-present subject of a mystical and transcendental nature, to suppose that she may have in all sincerity imagined herself to see and to feel as she described.

Of many of the miracles, including some of those most insisted on and boasted of by her biographer,—as for instance of the restoration of her mother to life,—a natural explanation, not necessarily involving any intentional falsehood, is so obvious, as to need no pointing. And others may, without any great improbability, be referred to mistake, inaccuracy, or exaggeration. On the whole, I do not think that the evidence constrains us to convict Catherine of falsehood or imposture in her miraculous pretensions. The impression of her innocence of this cannot, however, I think, be stated in any more forcible form. Few persons, probably, will obtain from an impartial consideration of the story, any satisfactory conviction that she was wholly sincere. We find her guilty of falsehood to her mother at an early period of her life, when she represents herself as frequenting certain hot baths with a different purpose than the real one, which was to burn herself by their heat, as a means of discounting eternal burning hereafter. This deception is related by her confessor as a holy and praiseworthy act. And the whole tenor of his morality, and of that of the school to which he belongs, forbids the idea, that a

high reverence for truth, as truth, formed any part of their teaching. There is nothing in all we know of Catherine, either from her own writings, or from those of her biographer, to indicate that her spiritual conceptions, religious system, or theory of morals, differed in any respect from the standard orthodoxy of her time and country. We find no more elevated notions of Deity, no saner views of duty, no nobler beau-ideal of human excellence. Her history may be regarded as the culminating expression of the ascetic divinity of that age. She lived wholly surrounded by, and devoted (very literally) body and soul, to a fiercely fanatical community, eager and conscientiously bound to advance their system and the glory of their order by all and every means. Their thoughts were her thoughts, their interests her interests, and their views of all things in heaven and earth, her views. And it must be admitted, that these considerations make it very difficult to suppose, that she would have felt the least scruple in lending herself to any scheme of pious fraud, which might appear calculated to promote the "glory of God," and of the order of St. Dominic. If she could have felt any such scruple, she assuredly would have been far in advance of the moral theories and feelings of her day; and this, as has been seen, there is every reason to think that she was not.

The same consideration of the story, as it has been handed down to us, which, despite the suspicion that a pupil of Father Raymond and the Dominicans of the fourteenth century could not have had any very strict ideas of the sacredness of truth, leads us nevertheless to believe it more probable that Catherine was no conscious impostor, by no means points to the same conclusion respecting the monk, her biographer and

confessor. Of course he could have had no means of ascertaining the reality of the visions she represented herself to be in the daily habit of seeing, beyond the natural probabilities of the case. And it is likely enough, that the cataleptic trances and convulsions witnessed by him, may have appeared to him, as to the generality of his contemporaries, the signs and consequences of supernatural communion with, and especial favour of, heaven. But there remain other portions of the narrative, in which facts are stated as having occurred within the writer's knowledge, which he must have known to be untrue. He could not have been deceived into supposing that Catherine lived for many years without food, though her own expressions on the subject, as has been pointed out, may have been equivocal. In one passage of her letters, referred to as containing authority of her own for the statement, the Saint, in speaking of the bodily sufferings she had recently endured, says that her body remained without food. But she says no word to indicate how long her fast lasted, and the reference is clearly a dishonest one.

Among the vast number of miracles related, it is difficult to find cases on which a charge of wilful fraud against the Dominican biographer can be safely pressed to conviction. In so many instances mistake may have been possible. In so many others, whatever he may have been inclined to believe in his own heart, he had no means of testing with certainty the truth of her statements to him; and, therefore, cannot be *convicted* of falsehood for repeating them. He *may* have believed them to be real facts. But one case of fair conviction is enough; and that we have in the statement of the total abstinence from food for many years. It should seem then, that although we may acquit

Catherine of conscious deception, we must believe her confessor,—the Barnum, who “brought out” the wonder, introduced her to the world, and reaped the profit of her,—to be a rogue and impostor.

Such a subject as this enthusiastic strong-willed cataleptic girl, was a rare and most valuable catch for the Dominican Order, and was to be turned to the best account accordingly. A real producible miracle-working Saint, who did veritably pass daily into a state of rapt extasy, and whose excitable and diseased brain was in that state ever prompt to impose on her imagination as realities whatever phantasmagoria of hallucinations her ghostly instructors chose to ply her waking fancy with, was a treasure calculated to bring much grist, spiritual as well as temporal, to the Dominican mill. In that remarkable case of the stigmata, which so admirably supplied the sons of St. Dominick with exactly what they needed, to enable them to hold their own against the rival Order of the Stigmatised St. Francis, how readily may be conceived the sort of conversation and suggestions, which must have prepared the mind of Catherine to reproduce the miracle for them as soon as her infirmity should set free her imagination from the world of reality!

And this capability of being played upon, rendered her, it is to be observed, a far more valuable instrument in the hands of those who touched the keys than if she had been a mere accomplice of imposture. Such an every-day cheat would hardly have accomplished the feats, and held the position, which are the most remarkable facts in this strange story, and which present an enigma, that requires some examination in the closing chapter of it.

CHAPTER VIII.



THE SECRET OF HER INFLUENCE.

THE recent reprint, and large circulation of the "Legend" and Letters of St. Catherine, give a present interest to her story, which it would otherwise want, and indicate but too clearly, that her influence is not a mere thing of the past, but a living and active fact. But the causes and nature of this influence are far from being a secret to those who have paid any attention to the present condition of Italy, and who understand the *modus operandi*, and policy of a church, the whole purpose, scope, and meaning of whose being, is the preservation of its own existence, and that of the sovereigns, its partners and accomplices in the subjugation and plundering of the people. And the direct and indirect uses of Saintly literature towards this end, however well worthy of being studied, form no proper part of the present subject. The influence, far more difficult to be accounted for, which Catherine cannot be denied to have exercised over Popes and Kings, her contemporaries, is what should be here explained, as far as any explanation can be found for it.

That none such must be sought in the literary qualities of her writings, has probably been made sufficiently manifest. When every allowance has been made for the intellectual difference, which may be supposed to exist between a fourteenth century and a

nineteenth century reader, it still remains incredible, that such missives, as that above translated from the Saint's Italian, should, irrespectively of any otherwise manifested claims of the sender of them, have been found powerfully persuasive by those to whom they were addressed. We have no proof, indeed, that this especial letter did produce any effect on the King of France. And with regard to the letters written to Urban, after the breaking out of the schism, it may be argued, that, whatever he may have privately thought of Catherine's pretensions and powers, he was no doubt too well aware of the importance an enthusiastic, well accredited Saint, might be of to his party, to think of throwing cold water on her zeal and exertions. The success of her mission to Avignon, however, and the employment of her intercession with the Pope by the rulers of Florence, testify abundantly to the esteem in which she was held.

Can it be supposed, that the wide-spread reputation she acquired, and the marvellous power she exercised, were derived from the impression made on her contemporaries by her virtues, the purity of her life, the earnestness of benevolence, and the zeal of her charity? But that would be to attribute to mere goodness a power over one of the most corrupt generations in the history of the world, which it has never been seen able to exert over any age. It would be to attribute to the virtue of Catherine a triumph, which the infinitely more perfect virtue of One infinitely greater than she failed to achieve.

Of all possible solutions this would be the least compatible with the conditions of the age in which she lived. But the low morality, to which mere purity of life would have appealed in vain, was especially

favourable to the powerful and successful operation of another class of the Saint's pretensions. In proportion as the intellectual and moral darkness of men make a spiritual conception of Deity more and more impossible to them, are they prone in the desolation of their unacknowledged, but none the less effective atheism, to accept with ready awe and reverential fear any such gross material manifestations, as profess to reveal to them a God sufficiently ungodly not to be disturbingly out of place in their scheme of life and eternity. Those "ages of faith," therefore, whose title to that appellation consists in their eager readiness to accept and believe any quantity of such miracles as could be conceived to proceed only from the will of a God created in the likeness of a very unspiritual man, were probably as little faithful to any spiritually profitable ideal of the Divine nature, as any generations since the dawn of Christianity.

To such ages Catherine was admirably adapted to appeal with remarkable force and success. Her strength of will, and her infirmity of body, both contributed to produce the effect to be explained. The first, as evidenced by the unflinchingly persevering infliction of self-torments, such as would have been wholly intolerable to a weaker will, and by continued exertion under suffering, weakness, and malady, made a large and important part of the saintly character; as the same qualities differently evidenced would have led to eminence in any career, and in any age. But joined to this potent strength of will may be observed evidences of a very remarkable degree of spiritual egotism, and "the pride that apes humility." The poor Sieneſe dyer's daughter must have been one of those rare natures, to whom the quiet obscure career

marked out for them, as it might seem, irrevocably by the circumstances of their birth, was an intolerable impossibility. A woman, poor, plebeian, unlettered, frail in health, and in the fourteenth century ! Surely no possible concatenation of circumstances could be devised, from which it would appear so impossible to emerge into power and celebrity ! But the "*Io Caterina schiava dei servi di Dio,*" of the letters, who thinks that entire nations shall be accepted or rejected as reprobate by the Eternal in accordance with the measure of HER merits or demerits, and who bargains with God to bear in HER own person the sacrilegious sin of a whole revolted people !—this Caterina was one whom no position could doom to the obscurity intolerable to such idiosyncrasies. And she rushed forth with uncontrollable determination on the one only path open to her ;—not by any means necessarily with the conscious intention of making hypocritical use of the profession of sanctity for the achievement of distinction ; but driven by the unrecognised promptings of ambition to the determination to excel in the department of human endeavour, which all contemporary opinion pointed out to her, as the highest, holiest, and noblest, open to mankind.

But the peculiar infirmity to which she was subject contributed a part of her extraordinary adaptability to the career she was to run, fully as important as any of the elements of strength in her character. Not only did her frequent cataleptic trances obtain from the people the most unhesitating belief in her supernatural communion with God, and in the miraculous visions which she related, in all probability with perfect sincerity, as having taken place therein ; but they had as powerful a subjective as an objective effect. The Saint

arose from each of these abnormal conditions of existence, nerved for fresh endurance, armed with increased pretensions, and animated with renewed enthusiasm, the result of hallucinations produced by the intensity of her waking wishes, imaginations, and aspirations.

To these fortunately combined elements of success must be added a third, perhaps hardly less essential to it than either. Catherine, with her equally valuable and rare gifts and infirmities, fell from the outset of her career into hands well skilled and well able to make the most of them. She was from the beginning a devoted member of the great Order of St. Dominick; and it may be doubted on which side lies the balance of obligation between the Saint and her order. If she was to them a fruitful source of credit, profit, and power, they afforded her a status, worldly-wisdom, and backing, without which she could not have attained the position she did. She had for her confessor and special adviser one whom we must suppose to have been the most notable man among the Dominicans of his time, inasmuch as he became their General. And we have seen enough of this able monk in his quality of Saint-leader, to authorise the belief, that he was quite ready to supply as much of the wisdom of the serpent, as might be needed to bring to a good working alloy the Saint's dove-like simplicity. In what exact proportions the metal was thus run, that was brought to bear on the Popes and other great people so strangely influenced by Catherine, it is impossible to say. But there will be little danger of error in concluding, that the effect of either ingredient solely would not have been the same.

Finally, should it still seem difficult to believe, that

two fourteenth century Popes, one a mild Frenchman, and the other an overbearing and choleric Italian, should have accepted the Sienese Virgin as a special messenger from Heaven, have really credited her miraculous pretensions, and have accorded a respect to her epistles on the score of their being inspired (which they assuredly would not have yielded to them as simply human compositions), it may be suggested, that men placed in the position of those Popes may possibly not have sincerely believed all that they deemed it politic to seem to believe. The miracle-working Saint, who came with such a man as Father Raymond to prompt her, backed by all the power and interest of the Dominican Order, with the ambassadorial credentials of the revolted and dangerous community of Florence in her hand, and with almost unlimited power of moving and directing the passions of large masses of the populace, was not a personage to be set at nought by a prudent Pontiff in the position of either Gregory XI. or Urban VI.

The history of Catherine's Saintship since her canonisation has been too much the same, as that of all her brethren and sisters of the calendar, to make it at all interesting to enter into details of the "*dulia*"—not worship! observe Protestant reader!—offered to her. She has her chapels, her relics, her candles, her office, her day, her devotees, like the rest of Rome's holy army. But what she could not be permitted to have, despite the recognition of Urban VIII., in 1628, was a claim to blood-relationship with the noble family of Borghese. Whether the Saint's heraldic backers were correct in attributing to her such an honour, or those of the Borghese right in disputing the fact, it is clear that that remarkably noble family had not

sufficient respect for saintly reputation, however exalted, to endure that a dyer's daughter, let her have been what she might, should mar by her vicinity the nobleness of the many barbarous barons and worthless knights who have borne the family name. So great was the outcry they raised, that Urban VIII. was obliged infallibly to unsay his previous saying on the subject.

By way of a conclusion, which, while it shows, that in the case of Catherine at least, there is an exception to the rule that excludes a prophet from honour in his own country, proves also that the subject of her Saintship is not a matter of mere historical interest, but aspires to the dignity of an "actualité," an anecdote may be told of the present Pope's recent journey through Tuscany.

Arrived at Siena, he too, like his predecessors, either thought it holy, or thought it politic, to pay due attention to the popular Saint in her own city. He accordingly directed the Saint's head, in its setting of silver and precious stones, to be brought from the Dominican church to his lodging in the Grand-ducal palace. But the populace of the city, especially the women of the ward in which the Saint was born, estimated the value of the precious relic so much more highly than they did the honesty of the Pontiff, that they insisted on not losing sight of their treasure, and could hardly be persuaded that Pio Nono had no burglarious intentions respecting it.

CATERINA SFORZA.

1462.—1509.

CHAPTER I.

Of Catherine's father, the Duke, and of his magnificent journey to Florence.

THE latter years of the fifteenth century, up to 1494, were a time of unusual prosperity in Italy. Never since the fall of the Roman empire, one thousand years previously, says Guicciardini,* had she enjoyed a period so flourishing and happy. "Reposing in perfect peace and tranquillity," continues the great historian, "cultivated in the more sterile and mountainous regions, as well as in the plains and fertile districts, subject to none save her native rulers, she not only abounded with inhabitants, trade, and wealth, but was especially adorned by the magnificence of a great number of princes, by the splendour of many noble and beautiful cities, by the majesty of the supreme seat of religion, and by the excellence of her great men in every art, pursuit, and science."

Of these noble and wealthy cities, Milan was one of the noblest and wealthiest; and Galeazzo Maria Sforza, its Duke, was one of the princes who most notably "adorned Italy with his magnificence." The Visconti had reigned there from 1277, till the death of

* Lib. i. cap. i.

Filippo, the last Duke of that race, in 1447, without heirs male. He had, some years before his death, given his daughter Bianca, and the succession to his duchy, to the celebrated soldier of fortune Francesco Sforza. And the magnificent Galeazzo, whose lot fell on the halcyon times described by Guicciardini, was the son of Francesco and Bianca, and succeeded his father in 1466.

Now, in the smiling and happy city of Milan, in these merry days of the good old time, there lived, eating his polenta, paying church-dues and taxes, and so pursuing, as quietly as he might, his way to dusty death among a crowd bound for the same bourne, a citizen named John Peter Landriano. To this John Peter, also, it might have been permitted to sleep in tranquil oblivion together with the others of his probably polenta-eating, and certainly tax-paying, fellow-citizens, instead of being still, after now four hundred years, thus extant, despite his "*fallentis semita vitæ*," had not Mnemosyne marked him for her own, by right of one small fact. He was the husband of a remarkably beautiful wife, named somewhat unhappily Lucretia, on whom it pleased his magnificent Highness Galeazzo Maria to look with condescension in the year 1462. In a later part of that same year, the family of John Peter Landriano was increased by the birth of a female child, named Catherine, whom his Highness was so good as to consider and educate as his own.

This splendid prince, who was, as Catherine's priestly biographer,* Burriel, informs us, more bookishly

* *Vita di Caterina Sforza*, dall' Abate Antonio Burriel, 3 vols. 4to. Bologna, 1795. Burriel was a Spanish priest; and his work, which I shall frequently have occasion to quote, is not deficient in research and painstaking, though it is the production of a thorough-going

inclined than could have been expected from a person of his exalted rank, took care that her education should be sedulously attended to by some of the learned persons who abounded in his court. And he had reason to be so well contented with the promise of her early years, that shortly after she had reached the age of eight, he caused her to be "legitimatised"—a curious process, which would seem to prove that, though not Jove himself has power o'er the past, Holy Mother Church possesses it.

Thenceforward Catherine's education was conducted under the superintendence of the Duchess Bona, a princess of the house of Savoy, whom Duke Galeazzo married in 1468 after the death of his first wife, Dorotea Gonzaga, by whom he had no child. It is to be supposed, probably, that the process of "legitimation," among its other mysterious virtues, had that of inspiring a good church-woman with maternal feelings for the offspring of another; for the Duchess Bona, who seems to have been a kind and gentle rather than a royal-souled lady, appears to have affectionately welcomed the little stranger as a princess of the noble house of Sforza, and to have done her best to prepare her duly for the high fortunes to which her father destined her, as a means of extending the connections and assuring the greatness of his house.

Such schemes, and others directed to the same end, formed the principal serious occupation of the Italian princes of that time, and were the fruitful source of atrocities and abominations innumerable, as the reader of Italian history well knows. To a certain degree

partisan, and one perfectly imbued with the opinion, that not only kings, but all royal and noble persons, whether mitred or coroneted, can do no wrong.

such ambition found its excuse in the great law of self-preservation. For in the perpetually shifting scene produced by the alliances, jealousies, leagues, ruptures, friendships and treasons, of a crowd of petty potentates, it was well nigh impossible for any family of princely rank to hold its own, neither encroaching itself, nor encroached on by others. The fortunes of each were ever on the rise, or on the decline. And at the period of our heroine's appearance on the scene, the peace, which Italy was then enjoying, was preserved only by a careful maintenance of the balance of power between some four or five of the leading princes of the peninsula.

How large a portion of the labours and of the abilities of statesmen has been devoted to the perpetual trimming of this troublesome balance, at a later period of the world's history on the great theatre of Europe, we all know. And it is interesting to observe how thoroughly the theory was understood, and how perfectly and sedulously reduced to practice by exceedingly accomplished professors of the art of state-craft, in the miniature world shut off from the rest of Europe by the Alps. Indeed, the smallness of the objects to be weighed against each other rendered the task of keeping the scales even in that microcosm a peculiarly delicate one. Where very small matters were capable of disarranging the adjustment of the balance, only great dexterity and prudence could preserve the equilibrium. And accordingly, the game of checking and counter-checking, far-sighted schemes of attack, and still more cunningly devised means for future defence, was carried on upon that small chess-board with a perfection of duplicity, vigilance, and small vulpine sagacity, which might give a lesson to most modern professors of the same art.

Ferdinand of Aragon at Naples, Popes Paul II., and his successor Sixtus IV. at Rome, Lorenzo the Magnificent at Florence, Galeazzo Maria Sforza at Milan, and the Republic of Venice,* were the powers between whom and by whom the balance of power, the peace of Italy, and the possessions of each of them, were to be preserved. The first four of these were, at the time in question, united in a common course of policy by the necessity of watching and keeping in check the ambitious Queen of the Adriatic, far more powerful than any one of the four, though much less so than all of them together. The rest of Italy, not comprised in the above five states, consisted of a crowd of petty principalities, which served singularly to complicate the game played by the great players, and to increase the interest of its vicissitudes. If endowed with any military talent, these small princes of a city and its immediate neighbourhood would take service as generals of the forces, in the pay of one or other of their more powerful neighbours. And in this way several of them became important elements in the calculations of those potentates. Some, again, would die without heirs male, and leave their female successors, daughter or widow, a prize to be scrambled for by the royal crowd always on the look out for such windfalls. Others were perpetually at feud with their own subjects, and thus gave an opportunity to some neighbour to intervene on behalf of one or the other party, with the same ultimate result. Finally, (and this was perhaps the way in which they most seriously compromised the tranquillity and influenced the destinies of Italy)—they formed the material from which each new Pope, who

* Guicciardini, lib. i. cap. i.

was anxious to be the founder of a princely family, sought to carve out a dominion for his "nephews" by any of those arts of fraud or intimidation, of which Rome was so consummate a mistress.

No sooner had Catherine's legitimation given her the value of a piece on the political chess-board, than she became involved in the moves of the game. At a very early age she had been promised in marriage to the Count Onorato Torelli, scion of a noble family, which had in the preceding generation given valuable support to the Sforzas, ere their star was so decidedly in the ascendant. But Catherine became a princess; the young Onorato very conveniently died; and Duke Galeazzo conceived schemes for selling his daughter in a better market. The Manfredi were lords of Imola, a neat little city, situated in the midst of a rich alluvial territory between the foot of the Apennines and the Adriatic, about twenty miles to the south of Bologna; a compact and very desirable little sovereignty in short, with taxes capable of an increased yield in the hands of an enterprising possessor.

Now it so happened, that Tadeo Manfredi, the reigning prince, was involved in a dangerous quarrel with Guidazzo, his son, who complained that his spendthrift father was loading "the property" with an unconscionable amount of debt. And this uncomfortable state of things was talked over at the splendid court of Milan. Whereupon Duke Galeazzo came forward with a proposition, which he hoped would prove acceptable to all parties. He would assign within the limits of his duchy an appanage to Tadeo, would pay that extravagant old gentleman's debts, and would give his daughter Catherine, with the lordship of Imola, which was thenceforth to be his, to Guidazzo. The bargain

certainly appeared advantageous enough to the Manfredi. The debts would be paid, and Guidazzo the heir, would after all be lord of his father's state; and whether in his own right, or that of his wife, would not so much signify.

But that little lady was, at the time she was thus disposed of, scarcely more than eight or nine years old. Poor Guidazzo had therefore to content himself with the promise of her hand, when she should have reached a marriageable age. And never was there period in the world's history, or clime on its surface, where slips between cup and lip were more abundant than in those good old times on the sunny side of the Alps.

Meanwhile old Tadeo is shelved on the estate of Castelnuovo, near Alessandria; Imola and its territory has passed into the hands of Duke Galeazzo; and young Guidazzo is dangling about the gay and magnificent court of Milan, and deems his fortune is a ripening, while his promised bride is daily growing in grace, beauty, and princely accomplishments, under the hot-house influences of the same splendid and dazzling environment.*

Dazzling indeed was the pomp, and ostentatiously reckless the expenditure of wealth, amid which Catherine passed those years of her life, when the impressions eagerly received from external objects are the most busy in forming the taste, and modifying the character. For the age was one of rapidly increasing luxury and riches. And the parvenu sovereign of Milan was especially bent on eclipsing his peers, and proving his right to his position among them by an

* Burriel, lib. i. cap. i.

unrivalled display of all that tailors, upholsterers, mercers, and jewellers can do towards creating the majesty that should hedge a king.

It was very shortly after he had concluded the arrangements for Catherine's future marriage, that, fired with this right royal ambition, Galeazzo determined on a festal journey to Florence, Lucca, Pisa, and so home by Genoa. Lorenzo, "the Magnificent," was sovereign in all save name at Florence, and now he was to be shown that Milan's Duke could advance a better claim to so proud a title. The Duchess Bona accompanied him. And from the provision of no less than twelve litters, it may be concluded that the other female members of his family, and doubtless Catherine among them, were of the party. These litters are called by a contemporary writer,* carts—"caretti"—but he adds that they were *carried on* mules over the mountains. The carts were covered with awnings of cloth of gold, embroidered with the ducal arms; and the "mattresses and feather beds" which were laid in the bottoms of them, were some of cloth of gold, some of silver, and some of crimson satin.

All the great feudatories who held of the Duke, and all the members of his council, each followed by several splendidly dressed servants, attended him. All the members of the ducal household were clothed in velvet. Forty footmen were decorated with golden collars, and other forty with embroidery. The Duke's grooms were dressed in silk, ornamented with silver. There were fifty led horses, with housings of cloth of gold, and gilt stirrups; an hundred men-at-arms, "each dressed as if he were a captain;" five hundred foot soldiers, all picked men; an hundred mules, covered with cloth of

* Corio, *Historia di Milano*, ad ann. 1471.

gold ; and fifty magnificently caparisoned pages. Two thousand other horses, and two hundred more mules, all covered with rich damask, carried the baggage of the multitudinous host. Five hundred couples of hounds, with huntsmen and falcons and falconers in proportion, together with trumpeters, players, mimes, and musicians, made part of the monstrous cortège.*

Let the reader picture to himself this gilded and velvet covered army, slowly wending in long slender file, glistening dazzlingly in the southern sun, but grievously tormented under their ponderously magnificent trappings by the same, as they laboured over the steep and sinuous Apennine paths, by which alone they could reach mountain-girt Florence. For only a difficult bridle-path then crossed those mountains, over which the traveller now rolls in his carriage between Modena and Florence. Let him imagine, too, the camp of the brilliant, but wayworn host, pitched for the night amid the shelter of a chesnut forest, in the midst of those wild hills, where even now, and much less then, there is neither town nor village capable of housing a tithe of such a multitude. And further, while amusing his fancy with such gorgeous and picturesque imaginings, let him not forget, that every yard of this cloth-of-gold, and richly-tinted velvet, represented the value of some horny palm's hard labour, the sweat of some weary brow, wrung from the wronged labourer by the most cruel and lawless severities of extortion.

But while the Duke and his Court were startling the

* Verri, Storia di Milano, cap. xviii. Corio, all' anno 1471. Rosmini, Istoria di Milano, vol. iii. p. 19. This learned, accurate, and trustworthy History of Milan, was printed in that city in four vols. 4to, 1820.

world with the glories of this unprecedented cavalcade, making awe-struck peasants wonder, emulous peers envy, and angels weep, there were three young nobles, who had remained at home at Milan, engaged in reading "certain passages of Roman history" with their schoolmaster, one Cola Montano. Their names were Giovanni Andrea Lampugnano, Girolamo Olgiato, and Carlo Visconti; and, I dare say, descendants of theirs, whether under those names or others, may yet be found in the fair city of Milan; and perhaps they may be equally fond of reading the Roman history,—an occupation, it might be supposed, as innocent, though not so fatiguing, as riding over the Apennines in a suit of cloth of gold. Yet the reverend and right-minded historian,* who mentions the circumstance, speaks of their occupation with much disgust and indignation. Perhaps he is right. Perhaps "certain passages of Roman history" are not wholesome reading for the subjects of splendid princes.

For the present, however, we will let Galeazzo ride on in his glory, and the young gentlemen pursue their story-fed meditations in tranquillity at Milan.

The Duke arrived at Florence on the 13th of March, and was magnificently received by the magnificent Lorenzo, who entertained him and his family in his own house, while the enormous body of his retainers and followers were lodged and fed at the cost of the city. The Florentine historian, Ammirato,† after having enumerated all the particulars of the pomp detailed above, goes on in the true spirit of the old Italian city-patriotism to maintain, that Galeazzo, "for all that, young and proud, and the minion of Fortune, as he

* Burriel, vol. i. p. 27.

† Ammirato, *Istorie Fiorentine*, lib. xxiii., Conf. 1079.

was, found himself obliged to admit that all his splendour was outdone by the magnificence of Lorenzo, inasmuch as the precious treasures of the Medici were far more admirable from the artistic excellence of the workmanship, than from the mere value of the material. "He could not but confess," continues the partisan of the Italian Athens, "that art had a higher value than mere costliness, as being attainable only by more arduous labour, and with greater difficulty; while he declared, that in all Italy he had not seen so great a number of paintings by the first masters, of gems, beautiful vases, statues ancient and modern, bronzes, medals, and rare books, as he now saw collected in the the palace of the Medici;—treasures which he should esteem cheaply purchased by any quantity of silver or gold."

Florence did all she could for the amusement of her princely guests. But as it was in time of Lent, she could not, as she did twelve years previously, when Galeazzo had visited the city as a boy, show him a "hunt," as the historian calls it,* of wolves, boars, lions, and a giraffe, on the Piazza of Santa Croce! To be "like the time," it was necessary that the dissipations should be of an ecclesiastical character. So the gallant company were treated to a representation of the Annunciation in the church of St. Felice, to the Ascension in the church of the Carmine, and to the descent of the Holy Ghost on the Apostles, at the church of the Santo Spirito.† The souls of the Lombards, says Ammirato, were filled with admiration of the wonderful artifices and ingenuity displayed on this occasion. And all passed off with the greatest éclat,

* Ammirato, lib. xxiii., Gonf. 1006.

† Note 1.

save that the church of Santo Spirito was burned to the ground by the forked tongues of fire.

This little accident was the only circumstance, that tended, says the historian, to mingle some flavour of bitterness with the general rejoicing. But the graver citizens of the republic complained that the brilliant Duke, when he started two days after this disaster on his return to his own states, full of compliments and admiration at his hospitable reception, left behind him among the young Florentine nobles a taste for profusion and display, which was a far greater evil than the enormous expense to which the city had been put, including the cost of rebuilding their burned church.

CHAPTER II.

A Franciscan Pope and a Franciscan Cardinal.—A notable illustration of the proverb concerning mendicant's rides.—The Nemesis of Despotism.

THE first news that reached the Court of Milan, after the return of the Duke, full of gratified vanity and glorification from his progress, was that of the death of Pope Paul II.,—that superb old man, who, if he had none other of the qualities befitting the head of the Church, yet at least looked every inch a Pope; of whom one of the chroniclers of the time says, that not having succeeded very well in his attempts at literary culture, “he determined to make his pontificate reputable by ornamental pomp, in which his majestic presence, and pre-eminently tall and noble person helped him not a little, giving him, as it did, the appearance of a new Aaron, venerable and reverend beyond that of any other Pontiff.”

And the tidings of the death of this magnificent lay-figure Pope were very shortly followed by the yet more interesting news of the election of his successor, on the 9th of August, 1471.

This successor was Francesco della Rovere, who had risen from the cell of a Franciscan friar by his merit as a scholar and theologian, and by his eloquence as a preacher, to be first, General of his order, then Cardinal; and now reached, as Sixtus IV., the highest aim of an ecclesiastic's ambition. He was the son

of a poor fisherman of the coast near Savona. For the fiction of the heralds, who found for him a place in the genealogy of the noble family of the same name, was an afterthought of the time, when such a relationship was acceptable to all the parties concerned. For though the Borghesi decidedly objected, as we have seen, to own any connection with a *roturiere* saint, the Della Rovere were well pleased enough to find a kinsman in a Pope, whose greatness manifested an immediate tendency to take a quite terrestrial and tangible shape.

For this barefooted mendicant friar—the vowed disciple of that St. Francis whom no degree of poverty would satisfy short of meeting his death naked and destitute on the bare earth—this monk, sworn to practise an humility abject in the excess of its utter self-abnegation, was the first of a series of popes who one after the other sacrificed every interest of the Church, waded mitre deep in crime and bloodshed, and plunged Italy into war and misery, for the sake of founding a princely family of their name.

It is curious to observe, that generally throughout the pontifical history, scandalously infamous popes and tolerably decent popes, are found in bunches, or series of six or eight in succession; a striking proof of the fact that when they have been of the better sort, the amelioration has been due to some force of circumstance operative from without. Never were they worse, with perhaps one or two exceptions, than during the century which preceded the first quickly-crushed efforts of the Reformation in Italy—from about 1450, that is to say, down to 1550. Competing Protestantism then began to act on the Roman Church exactly as competing Methodism acted on the Anglican

Church three centuries later; and a series of Popes of a different sort was the result.

But the conduct of the great family-founding popes, which strikes us, looking at it through the moral atmosphere of the nineteenth century, as so monstrous, wore a very different aspect even to the gravest censors among their contemporaries. The Italian historians of the time tell us of the "royal-mindedness" and "noble spirit" of this ambitious Franciscan, Pope Sixtus, in a tone of evident admiration. And the gross worldliness, the low ambition, and the unscrupulous baseness, of which he may fairly be accused, did not seem even to Du Plessis Mornai,* and the French Protestant writers of that stamp, to be sufficient ground for denouncing him and the system which produced him. Otherwise they would not have disgraced themselves and their cause by asserting that he was guilty of hideous and nameless atrocities, for which, as the less zealous but more candid Bayle† has sufficiently shown, there is no foundation either in fact or probability.

The new Pope lost no time in turning the papacy to the best possible account, in the manner which had for him the greatest attractions. And it so happened that he was singularly well supplied with the raw material from which the edifice of family greatness he was bent on raising was to be furnished forth. He had no less than nine nephews: five of them the sons of his three brothers, and four the sons of his three sisters!—a field for nepotism sufficiently extensive to satisfy the "high-spirited" ambition of even a Sixtus IV. But among all this wealth of nephews, the two sons of his

* Du Plessis Mornai, *Mystère d'Iniquité*, p. 555, *et seq.*

† Article sixte iv.

eldest sister, Girolamo and Pietro Riario, were distinguished by him so pre-eminently, that a great many contemporary writers, thinking it strange that he should prefer them to those of his own name, have asserted that these young men were in fact his sons.* Giuliano della Rovere, the eldest of all the nine, who received a cardinal's hat from his uncle, but could obtain from him no further favour, was nevertheless destined, as Pope Julius II., to become by far the most important pillar of the family greatness. The course of Catherine's fortunes, however, will justify the present reader in confining his attention, as all Rome was doing in the year 1472, to the two fortunate young men on whom the pontifical sun shone brightest.

Peter Riario was, like his uncle, a Franciscan monk, and was twenty-six years old when the latter was elected. Within a very few months he became Bishop of Treviso, Cardinal-Archbishop of Seville, Patriarch of Constantinople, Archbishop of Valentia, and Archbishop of Florence! From his humble cell, from his ascetic board, from his girdle of rope and woollen frock renewed yearly, and baked occasionally to destroy the vermin bred in its holy filth, this poverty-vowed mendicant suddenly became possessed of revenues so enormous, that his income is said to have been larger than that of all the other members of the Sacred College put together! The stories which have been preserved† of his reckless and unprecedented expenditure at Rome, would seem almost incredible were they not corroborated by the fact that he had in a very short

* Corio, the contemporary annalist of Milan, writes: "*Hebbe due che egli chiamava Nipoti.*"—Istor. Mil. p. 974. "*Secundo che ciascuno credeva, erano suoi figliuoli.*"—Machiavelli, St. lib. vii.

† Papiensis Cardinalis Epis., 548. Diario di Ste. Infissura, p. 1144.

time, besides dissipating the enormous wealth assigned to him, incurred debts to the amount of sixty thousand florins! He gave a banquet to the French ambassadors which cost twenty thousand crowns, a sum equal to more than ten times the same nominal amount at the present day. "Never," says the Cardinal of Pavia, "had pagan antiquity seen anything like it. The whole country was drained of all that was rare and precious; and the object of all was to make a display, such as posterity might never be able to surpass.* The extent of the preparations, their variety, the number of the dishes, the price of the viands served up, were all registered by inspectors, and were *put into verse*, of which copies were profusely circulated, not only in Rome, but throughout Italy, and even beyond the Alps."

Girolamo, the brother of this spendthrift monk, and equally a favourite of his uncle, was a layman; and the process of enriching and aggrandising him was necessarily a somewhat slower one. Not even a fifteenth-century pope could accomplish so monstrous an iniquity and insult to humanity as the promotion of Peter Riario in any other branch or department of human affairs save the Church! Girolamo, however, who was, we are told, "not literate," was at once made Captain-General of the pontifical troops, and Governor of the Castle of St. Angelo. And for his further advancement measures were adopted, which, among other advantages, have conferred upon him that of occupying a prominent place in these pages.

For it so happened, that the elevation of Sixtus IV. to the papal throne turned out to be the "slip" which dashed from poor Guidazzo's lips the cup he was wait-

* See Note 2.

ing for in the shape of the bride, who was to bring back to him as her dower his lost principality of Imola. The tidings from Rome, which were astonishing all history with accounts of the wonderful and unprecedented "greatness" achieved by the Riario brothers, produced a prodigious sensation at the court of Milan. Here was evidently a rising sun worth a little worship! And now, how valuable became our little "legitimatised" Kate, as a means of hooking on our ducal fortunes to the career of this "high-spirited" Pope, and the magnificent nephews so evidently marked out for high destinies! What was Guidazzo and his little state of Imola in comparison to the favourite nephew of a "high-spirited" Pope? And besides, there is no reason to give up Imola, because we give up Guidazzo. Imola is in our own hands, and will make a dower for our daughter by no means unworthy of the consideration of a Franciscan monk's reputed son, about to start on his career of sovereign prince. So Guidazzo may go whistle for his patrimony!

The gorgeous accounts of the Cardinal Peter Riario's unprecedented splendour and reckless prodigality especially touched a sympathetic chord of admiration in the bosom of Maria Galeazzo. The splendid Duke, who lavished on upholstery, festivals, and courtezans, the substance wrung from a groaning people, recognised a kindred spirit in the princely churchman, who expended the revenues of a dozen sees on a banquet and revel. The spirit of noble rivalry, too, was awakened in the Ducal bosom. Here was a man in whose eyes it was worth while to shine, and whose admiration would confer real glory.

It was to the Cardinal, accordingly, that Galeazzo caused the first cautious overtures to be made; and

the reception of them was such as to encourage him to entreat his Eminence to honour his poor court with a visit. The Cardinal was nothing loth to accept the invitation. He, too, recognised in the Duke of Milan that "greatness" which was most calculated to excite his sympathy and admiration. He, too, felt, that here was a spirit of his own calibre,—one with whom he would willingly pull together in the arduous work of furthering their mutual fortunes, and vie in the ostentation of magnificence.

The Cardinal's visit to Milan was accordingly arranged with as little delay as possible. He left Rome with a train more like that of the most magnificent of popes, say the chroniclers, than what might befit a cardinal, and reached Milan on the 12th of September, 1473.* Great were the preparations made to receive him, and bitter were the groans of the magnificent Duke's hapless subjects under the new extortions necessitated by their master's gorgeous "hospitality." The glittering cavalcade of the lay prince met the no less glittering cavalcade of the ecclesiastical prince at the gates of the city; and, as those were "ages of faith," both proceeded at once to the cathedral to inaugurate the pleasure and business of the meeting by a solemn "Te Deum." So thoroughly did the sanctifying influences of religion, as has been often remarked, pervade every affair of life in those happy times!

All Milan was witness to the festal doings on this notable meeting,—the processioning, revelling, tailoring, gilding, and reckless profusion, which marked the noble rivalry between these two great men. This friendly emulation was pushed to an intensity, which seems unhappily to have led the lay champion in the generous

* Note 3.

contest to have recourse to disloyal arms against his rival. For a tell-tale gossip of the pestilent race of scribblers has recorded that the great Galeazzo purchased secretly a quantity of imitation gems, and passed them off for real ;* an anecdote extremely creditable to the fifteenth century artificers in that line. In all the ordinary pastimes and pleasures of the princes of that day, of whatever sort, the splendid Cardinal, though so recently a mendicant friar, was able and willing to run neck and neck with his secular host. But some of Maria Galeazzo's favourite enjoyments were not ordinary. He was ever an avid eye-witness of the executions, tortures, and mutilations, which his duty as a sovereign obliged him frequently to inflict on his subjects. We have indeed on record a sufficient number of instances of princes who had this taste, to justify our deeming it part of a despotic ruler's natural idiosyncrasy. But Galeazzo had stranger, if less maleficent, propensities. He revelled in the sight of death, and human decay. Some strange touch of that insanity, which so frequently, and with such salutary warning, develops itself in minds exposed to the poison that wells out from the possession of unchecked power, influenced, as in such cases it is apt to do, his moral rather than his intellectual nature. He would cause himself to be brought into the presence of the suffering, the dying, and the dead, for the mere pleasure of witnessing pain and destruction. He would rifle graves to gaze on the process of corruption, and haunted charnel-houses, impelled by the instinct of the ghoul, rather than by any touch of that sentiment, which impels the morbid fanatic to seek in such contemplatio

* Gioviano Pontano, in the first chapter of his book, "De Splendore."

a moving sermon on the vanity of human wishes. This man, whose wishes, hopes, and ambitions were as unbridled in their violence as low and vain in their aims and scope, would hurry from the death-chamber to the revel, and from the charnel-house hasten to plot long-sighted intrigues in the council-hall.

For the latter the pleasure-loving Cardinal was as ready as for gala making and revelry. Long conferences were held between the host and his guest in the secrecy of the Duke's private chambers. But princes are more than other men subjected to the vigilant surveillance of those who form their pomp or minister to their service. And their secrets, therefore, are rarely absolutely secret. Accordingly, Corio, the page, chamberlain, and annalist—a dangerous pluralism for better sovereigns than Galeazzo Sforza!—Corio informs us, though qualifying his assertion with a cautious “*si dice*,” that these prolonged discussions had for their object the terms of a bargain between the Duke and the Cardinal, by virtue of which the former was to be exalted into King of Lombardy by the acquisition of sundry provinces from the smaller princes around him, and especially by the conquest of the terra-firma possessions of Venice; while the latter was to be insured the succession to his uncle on the papal throne. This statement of the chamberlain and page has been believed by most subsequent historians. Verri, without any qualification, writes that such was the fact. Rosmini contents himself with saying that such is believed to have been the case.

But alas! for the short span which should forbid such long-sighted hopes. To men who live such lives as his Eminence the Cardinal Riario, the span is apt to be especially short. And as for the Duke . . . there are

Cola Montano the scholar, and his three young pupils, all the time of this splendid revelry in Milan, reading Roman history harder than ever!

Meanwhile the other business, which had to be settled between the high contracting powers—the marriage of Catherine to Girolamo Riario—though not unattended with those difficulties which naturally arise between parties intent on driving a hard bargain, was at length brought to a satisfactory conclusion. The Duke was to give his daughter the city and territory of Imola, and sixteen thousand ducats, besides certain estates in the Milanese for her separate use. The Pope was to give Girolamo forty thousand ducats, and “expectations;” which, in the case of such a nephew of such a Pope, might fairly be reckoned at a high figure.

The youthful bride, just past her eleventh birthday, was accordingly betrothed publicly to Girolamo Riario, who performed his part of the ceremony by proxy. The young couple had never seen each other; but we are told much of the mutual admiration of the future brother and sister-in-law for each other. The Cardinal was loud in his praises of the beauty, grace, and accomplishments of the hot-house forced child, who was to be made so important a stepping-stone to his brother’s fortunes. And she was dazzled and delighted with his magnificence and splendour, and especially charmed, we are assured,* by his eloquence!

The luxuriously-nurtured little lady, it may be fancied, would not have appreciated so highly the “eloquence” of the mendicant friar, had he presented himself to her notice in his garb of some three years

* Burriel, lib. i. cap. iii. p. 21.

previously. But when grave historians* assure us, that the fortunate monk on his elevation “put on a lofty and imperial spirit,” and when all Italy was admiringly marvelling at his cost-despising splendour, a little girl, and she the daughter of Galeazzo Sforza, may be excused for being captivated by one, who appeared to possess in a higher degree than any other man, all that her experience of life had taught her to value.

When these matters had thus been satisfactorily settled, the Cardinal prepared to bring his visit to a conclusion, and informed his host of his intention to pass a short time at Venice before returning to Rome. The Duke strongly urged him to abandon any such idea. The secret schemes which they had been engaged in concocting, were mainly based on the intended spoliation of the great republic. Uneasy suspicions, as the chroniclers mention, had already been aroused in various courts by the prolonged conferences of the Duke and his guest. The Signory of Venice had proverbially long ears, and unscrupulous arms at its command. It might well be, urged the Duke, that at the present conjuncture, Venice might not be so safe a place of sojourn for his Eminence as could be wished. Probably, also, Sforza had jealous suspicions that Riario’s business at Venice might possibly be to play a double game,—to throw him over in case contingencies might arise to make such a policy expedient,—and to prepare his way with the Signory for any such eventualities.

At all events his representations and endeavours were in vain. The Cardinal was bent on visiting Venice; and to Venice he went. In all probability

* *Vitæ Pontif. et Card. in vita Petri*, “sublimes spiritus et imperio idoneos induit.”

his leading motive was to exhibit his magnificence to the nobles of perhaps the richest and most pleasure-loving capital in Italy. Nowhere did that taste for show and festive pomp, which was so especially his own, prevail to so insane a degree as among the money-making nobles of the Queen of the Adriatic.

The celebrated "Compagnia della Calza," or Guild of the Stocking, was flourishing there, and distinguishing itself by extravagances altogether in the taste of the brilliant Franciscan Cardinal. This stocking brotherhood, which derived its name from the circumstance of each member wearing parti-coloured hose, differently quartered with brilliant colours, was instituted by the wealthy young nobles,—the *jeunesse dorée* of pleasure-loving Venice—for the avowed purpose of encouraging magnificence in dress, and of providing opportunities for the exhibition of it by organising those gala spectacles and pomps, which so many of the gorgeous artists of the republic have perpetuated on their glowing canvas. The description * given us of their costume is made up of velvet, satin, embroidery, cloth of gold, brocade and jewels. On the long pointed hood which hung at their backs, was embroidered the heraldic cognisance of each man's family; which was repeated on that part of the black or red cap, which hung pendant over the ear. The hair, which was kept as long and as abundant as possible, was tied up with a cord of silk. The doublets generally of velvet, were worn with slashed sleeves showing a portion of fine linen underneath, and tied with silken cords ornamented with tassels of solid gold. In the hand it was the mode to carry a ball containing perfumes.

* Ferrario, Costumiere, vol. viii. p. 314.

The Cardinal, Archbishop of so many churches, was ambitious of exhibiting his magnificence among these illustrious youths, and taking a part in their gorgeous revels. Despite the prognostications of the Duke of Milan, he was received with all honour by the Venetians, hailed as a worthy compeer by the heroes of the parti-coloured stocking, fêted to his heart's content, and taken leave of, when towards the end of the year he started on his return to Rome, with every demonstration of respect and friendship.

But there were ancient Senators in Venice, very gravely sitting in one of those thick-walled smaller chambers on the second floor of the Ducal palace, reading despatches in cypher from secret agents, taking secret counsel together, and making secret provision for the safety of the republic, while the *jeunesse dorée* and the gay and gallant guest, who had so recently been plotting against the Queen of the Adriatic, were dazzling the citizens with their gilding and parti-coloured hose. . . . And it did so happen, that the young Cardinal died from some cause or other, a few days after his arrival in Rome.

Mnemosyne says nothing; since she knows nothing on the subject, beyond the facts here set down. But she may be permitted to observe, on the one hand, that fifteenth-century dissipation was particularly destructive of human life, and that the Cardinal had evidently for some time past been leading a life to kill any man;—and on the other hand, that as a specimen of the good old times, the very general contemporary suspicion that St. Mark's lion *had* stretched out on this occasion a long and stealthy paw, comes much to the same thing

as evidence of character, as if the deed itself were chronicled.*

The Cardinal died on the 5th of January, 1474, to the great grief of Pope Sixtus, says Corio,† and to the infinite delight of the whole college of Cardinals. The indignation caused by the accumulation of so many scandalous vices, and so many rich benefices on one pair of purple shoulders, manifested itself after the wonted fashion of the eternal city in a volley of epigrams and satirical epitaphs more savage than witty. One somewhat to the following effect,‡ was found placarded on the monument raised over his remains by the afflicted Pope :

“Once more let worth, and long lost virtue reign,
 And vice be banish'd from its throne in Rome !
 Rogues, wretches, profligates, and all their train
 No more shall find on Latian soil their home ;
 For he, the plague-spot of our church and state,
 Peter, is gone to meet in hell his fate.”

Orthodox Burriel, however, assures us, that all the malicious outpourings of envious hate were silenced and put to shame by the following victorious couplet in the genuine decorous tombstone style.

“Sage in his prime !—’tis that has caused our tears ;
 Death from his virtues deemed him full of years.”

Among the select minority, who truly mourned the premature death of this youthful sage, the Duke of Milan and his daughter may be safely reckoned. The marriage arranged wholly by him might very possibly run risk of being broken off. And in any case the

* Infessura says, without intimating any doubt, “fu atossicato,”—“he was poisoned,” but he does not say by whom. *Rer. Ital. Script.*, tom. iii. par. 2, p. 1144.

† *Ist. Mil.*, p. 976.

‡ See note 4.

Duke's ulterior and more ambitious schemes were nipped in the bud.

Catherine was, however, as her biographer assures us, "infinitely rejoiced and comforted" by an early courier from Rome, bearing assurances, that her unseen bridegroom and his august kinsman had no intention of allowing the Cardinal's death to make any difference in the arrangements for the marriage.

Let the reader's mind dwell a moment on the "infinite rejoicing and comfort" of this eleven-year-old princess, at the news that she was not after all to lose her marriage with an unseen stranger;—remembering the while that, making allowance for longitude and latitude, we Northerners may for "eleven" read thirteen or fourteen.

The Duke prudently hastened to make peace with his powerful and dangerous neighbours, the Venetians, and having accomplished this, soothed his disappointment by giving a magnificent reception to some envoys sent to him by the Sultan of Egypt; a circumstance so novel in Europe, as greatly to exalt, we are told, the name and glory of the house of Sforza among neighbouring, and even among transalpine, courts and princes; and which naturally and necessarily required, in order to do due honour to the occasion, new taxes on the subjects of a dynasty so distinguished, new pretexts for compelling rich citizens to purchase pardon for imaginary offences, and new perversions of law for the purpose of colouring confiscations.

These, however, were little matters, which passed in the shade fitted for such things. The broad sun-light of prosperity shone gloriously on the house of Sforza, on its apparently durably established fortunes, and on the gala doings in the gay streets of sunny Milan. The

poor might grumble low down in the social depths out of hearing about scarcity and dearness of bread; a few citizens might groan over ducats or lands abstracted, or wives or daughters abducted for the needs or pleasures of their gracious sovereign; but the admirable principles of civil and religious duty and subordination, which prevailed in those ages of faith, were such, that in all probability the great Galeazzo might have continued to preserve order, and save society in Milan, had not those gloomy students, whom we have from time to time caught sight of poring over their crabbed folios, while the merry city was gazing at some brilliant and costly pageant or other, brought their studies to a conclusion towards the end of the year 1476. For though it did so happen,* that two out of Cola Montano's three pupils owed to the Duke's profligacy a sister's shame, while the family of the third had been unjustly deprived by him of an inheritance, yet the historians, who have recorded the facts, seem to be unanimously of opinion, that had it not been for those pernicious historical readings, they would have borne these misfortunes as meekly as hundreds of their fellow-citizens did similar mishaps, instead of posting themselves at the door of the cathedral on St. Stephen's day in December of the year 1476, and there stabbing to death their sovereign lord in the midst of his guards, and of the assembled crowd.

The names of these misled youths were Giovanni Andrea Lampugnani, Girolamo Olgiato, and Carlo Visconti. The first was killed by one of the Duke's attendants immediately after the commission of his crime. Visconti was arrested, and ordered to immediate

* Rosmini, vol. iii. p. 34.

execution by being quartered. Olgiato escaped from the church, and fled to his father's house. But father and brothers alike refused to afford him any shelter. His mother alone found means to persuade a certain priest to hide the murderer in his house. After three days' concealment, the unhappy youth crept forth to ascertain the aspect of the city, and the feelings of the citizens thus liberated from their tyrant. The first sight that met his eyes was the corpse of his friend and fellow criminal Lampugnani, dragged through the streets by an exulting and ferocious rabble. This horrible proof of the futility of all his hopes, and of the judgment passed upon his deed by his fellow-citizens, so drove him to despair, that he at once gave himself up into the hands of justice. On his trial for the crime, seeing that none were left alive who could be injured by the recital, he gave a full account of the whole conspiracy. And from this document are drawn the narratives of the historians. He was condemned to be torn to pieces by iron pincers, "tanagliato;"—that being the proper juridical term to indicate a by no means unprecedented mode of punishment.

"*Stabit vetus memoria facti*" were the last words uttered by the dying regicide, as the living flesh was being rent from the quivering muscles. And indeed the sad story has been made the subject of a tragedy much praised by Milanese* writers; but which does not seem, unfortunately, to have so moralised the tale, as to make it likely that it should at present be represented in the theatres of that city.

And, truly, when we find a man in the position, and of the character of Verri, writing a grave and learned

* Verri, *Ist. Mil.*, chap. xviii.

history at the close of the last century, and representing in its well-considered pages the deed of Girolamo Olgiato as similar in kind to that of Oliver Cromwell, we cannot but become sensible how wholly and irreconcilably different the views and moral judgments of a law-respecting Anglo-Saxon on such subjects, must needs be from those of a people, to whom, for centuries, LAW has been presented only as the expression of a despot's will. To the inmost heart of nations so trained amiss, we may be sure, that "the wild justice of revenge" will commend itself with a force of honest conviction, proportioned ever to the amount of wrong suffered, and not to the heinousness of wrong done, by those who, at their own risk and peril, take upon themselves the execution of it.

Thus died at the age of thirty-two years the magnificent Maria Galeazzo Sforza, our heroine's father. Did these pages profess to give a biography of him instead of his daughter, it would be necessary to follow the chroniclers of his time through the long and sickening list of his cruelties and abominations. This we may spare ourselves. For the purpose of showing what tendencies and dispositions his daughter may be supposed to have inherited, and what were the manners and habits of the home in which, and from which, she received her early impressions and education, it will be sufficient, in addition to what has been already said, to mention one or two of the facts which history has put on record against this man.

There is every reason to believe that he murdered his mother by poison. All the authorities concur in representing her as an excellent and very able princess, whose wisdom and energy ensured his quiet succession to his father's throne. He very soon

became jealous of her authority ; drove her by his ill treatment from Milan ; and is believed to have poisoned her at the first halting-place of her journey from that capital towards her own dower city, Cremona. His guilt was very generally credited by his contemporaries, and subsequent writers concur in thinking their suspicions in all probability just.

Enough has probably been said in previous pages to give the reader some idea of the profligate debauchery which marked the whole course of his life. It is unnecessary to transfer to an English page the details of cynical immorality, mingled with a ferocious cruelty, which seems to mark them to a certain degree with the character of insanity, as recorded by the old writers,* especially by Corio, his own personal attendant. It is sufficient to have drawn attention to the influences which must have been exercised by the moral atmosphere of such a court, and such a home on the young bride, who is about to step from it to a court of her own.

* Note 5.

CHAPTER III.

Catherine's marriage.—“Petit Courier des dames” for 1476.—Four years of prosperity.—Life in Rome in the fifteenth century.—A hunting party in the Campagna.—Guilty or not guilty?—Catherine and her husband leave Rome.

IF the death of the Cardinal Riario had seemed, during a few anxious days, to throw a doubt on the successful termination of the matrimonial schemes projected for Catherine, much greater was the danger to which they were exposed by the untimely death of the Duke. “Catherine herself,” says Burriel, “considering the circumstances of her birth, thought that it was now all over with her fortune.” And, in truth, it was hardly to be hoped that the Duchess Bona, now Regent, would consent to prejudice her own children by giving up Imola as the dower of a stranger to her blood, obtruded under such circumstances into her family. Meanwhile, the bridegroom Girolamo, and his august, “high-spirited” uncle, had, on their side, been struck by similar misgivings on receiving the news of Maria Galeazzo's death; and they were by no means disposed to relinquish the principality, whose title Girolamo had already assumed.

Sixtus, therefore, well aware, remarks Burriel, of the truth of the proverb which teaches that “this world is given to the active,”* lost no time in sending

* “Questo mondo è dei solleciti.”

Cardinal Mellini to Milan, with orders to claim the prompt execution of the marriage contract, and to hurry on the performance of the ceremony by every possible means. This active churchman arrived while the Duchess and all Milan were still in the midst of the confusion, anxieties, and uncertainties resulting from the sudden demise of the Crown. The position of the Duchess as Regent and guardian of her son, still in his minority, was precarious and difficult. Subsequent events at Milan abundantly show how difficult a task it was to maintain her own and her son's rights against the pretensions and encroachments of his uncles. The friendship or hostility of the royal-minded and high-handed *Servus servorum* might be of infinite importance to her and to Milan. The good Bona, too, was inclined to make it a point of honour to carry out the intentions of her murdered husband. The Cardinal, acting up zealously to his instructions, urged unceasingly that "if 'twere done, 'twere well it were done quickly." And thus it was brought about that, without any alteration in the articles previously agreed upon, Catherine was married to Girolamo Riario acting by proxy, in the latter part of May, 1477.

As the mourning for the Duke was not yet over, the ceremony was performed in a comparatively private manner in the presence of the Cardinal and the Duchess. And as no festivities and rejoicings were under the circumstances permissible in Milan, it was determined that the bride should depart immediately for Rome, and that all such celebration should take place there under the auspices of the young couple's magnificent uncle. No record is found of the exact date of the marriage; but Catherine arrived in Rome about the end of May.

The "sensation" produced in Rome by the young bride's arrival is dwelt on by the historians, and may be readily believed. All the contemporary chroniclers agree in describing her as eminently beautiful.* A modern historian † of Forlì cites in proof of the truth of these assertions two likenesses of her still existing, when he wrote, in the church of St. Jerome in that city. And a Forlì coin and two medals, engraved for the work of Burriel, fully confirm the praises of the old writers. All three of these portraits appear to have been made after the death of Girolamo Riario. The face is hard and even stern, but full of vigour and intelligence. The features are somewhat large, but of beautiful outline and perfect regularity: a face to be admired rather than to be loved.

When at fifteen she rode through the Porta del Popolo into Rome, in the midst of the brilliant cavalcade composed of all that was noblest in the eternal city, those finely-cut features were doubtless softer in their expression, more delicate in their beauty, and more fitted to win all hearts in the manner we are assured they did. It was about a generation later that a jovial prelate, ‡ writing to his friend from Rome, protested that nothing was wanting to the pleasures of a residence there save "a court with ladies." But no doubt the same want was a frequent one among the tonsured epicureans of a court in which every high office was held by a priestly incumbent. And now the lamentable deficiency was about to be supplied by the

* Filippo da Bergamo: "Est quippe hæc Catarina inter mulieres nostri sæculi formosissima, et eleganti aspectu, ac per omnes corporis artus mirificè ornata est." Bernardi, her personal attendant for many years, writes that she was "molto formosa del suo corpo."

† Paolo Bonoli, *Storia di Forlì*, 2 vols. 1826; vol. ii. p. 211.

‡ Cardinal Bibbiena to Giuliano de Medici.

young and lovely bride of the most powerful, most magnificent, and wealthiest prince in Rome. For all this was Girolamo, the survivor of the two favoured brothers, who had divided between them all that Papal affection and munificence could bestow.

Doubtless nothing was left undone which could add brilliancy to the gay cavalcade amid which Girolamo brought his wife to her new home. The period was especially favourable to the display of personal splendour; and the fashion of dress, especially of female costume, had recently assumed an elegance and costly gorgeousness unknown to the previous generation. If we would figure to ourselves our fifteen-year-old heroine as she appeared on her richly-caparisoned "dappled palfrey" to the admiring eyes of the Roman citizens, we must picture her clad in one of those then recently-introduced dresses called "Cyprians," of which we hear so much in the records of the time, and which were the favourite mode of the young and beautiful towards the end of the fifteenth century.

Like other innovations in similar matters, this new costume, we are told, gave much offence to the more austere among those who never in their own day had enjoyed any such opportunity of displaying their charms, and who were now too old to profit by it.* For, instead of being made to fit close round the throat, the "Cyprian" was contrived to show the entire neck. These dresses were cut square on the bust, were extremely full around the feet, close-fitting from the waist upwards, and had very long and large sleeves. Some ladies would have even three of these celebrated robes: one of blue, one of crimson, and one of watered camblet—"zambellotto undato"—lined with silk or

* Note 6.

with mixed furs. Beautifully thin and fine veils of white cotton were worn ; and the hair was drawn back over hair-cushions, and tied with strings of silk ornamented with gold or with pearls. A girdle of silver gilt or of pearls confined the dress at the waist.

We may be perfectly sure, that the daughter of Sforza and bride of Riario displayed whatever was most costly and most superb, as she passed from the Porta del Popolo to the princely residence of her husband on the Lungara, that long street which runs along the farther bank of the river from St. Peter's to the Porta Settimana. There the Riarii inhabited the spot now marked on the maps as the Palazzo Corsini. Two hundred and fifty years further down on the roll of pontiffs the latter name is met with ;* the place of the magnificent Riarii knows them no more ; and the change of masters, which those delicious terraces, looking down on the Farnese palaces and gardens,—the creations of another Papal † family intermediate in time between the Riarii and the Corsini—have undergone, is a quite normal illustration of the working of a system, which is the leading fact of Rome's modern history.

In this magnificent home on the banks of the Tiber, Catherine spent four happy, prosperous, and brilliant years ;—probably the most happy, the most prosperous, and the most brilliant of her career. Never, perhaps, since the old times of a Marozia and a Theodora, whose boundless and shameless power in the eternal city had given rise to the fable of a female Pope, had a woman occupied a position of so much power and pre-eminence in Rome. She very shortly became an all-powerful

* Clement XII., A.D. 1730.

† Paul III., A.D. 1534.

favourite with her uncle (or father-in-law) Sixtus. All Rome was absolutely at her feet. Courtiers in search of favour, litigants in search of justice—(or injustice)—officials in search of promotion, brought their petitions and applications to her. The most important employments were often given according to the recommendations of this girl in her teens, as Burriel * assures us, without manifesting the shadow of an idea, that there was anything objectionable in such a mode of administering the Papal power. At this period of her life, writes another † chronicler, she was so great a favourite with the Pope, that most of the princes of Italy, who had any request to make of the Apostolic see, availed themselves of the intercession of Catherine for the attainment of their desires.

Though apparently totally unaware, that all this was in any way otherwise than it should have been, the old writers tell us much of Catherine's prudence, discretion and moderation in wielding and managing the great power so strangely entrusted to such hands. We have no recorded facts adducible in direct proof of the justice of this high praise. But we may find some evidence in support of it from the observation of our heroine under adversity ; for which some later portions of her career will afford abundant opportunity. Assuredly there must have been materials of high and noble quality in a nature not wholly corrupted and spoiled by such an education and such environment in childhood and in youth, as that which fell to the lot of this young princess.

Dark days were not far distant ; but all as yet in her

* Vita di Catarina, lib. i. chap. iv. p. 31.

† Bernardi, p. 429.

life had been rose-colour:—or purple-tinted rather; for the more modest hue seems hardly gorgeous enough to typify the blaze of prosperous sunshine which had hitherto illumined her path. And now, during these years at Rome, though they had been sufficiently marked already as the minions of fortune, the star of the young couple was still ever rising.

On the 15th of December of the year in which Catherine arrived in Rome, her husband was with much ceremony and speechifying made a citizen of the eternal city.*

On the 4th of September 1480, the same fortunate youth received from the Pope investiture of the city and county of Forlì;† of which the Duke of Urbino, general of the forces of the Church, took possession in his name. This city, now the capital of a delegation, and one of the most important towns of Romagna, was conveniently situated with regard to the principality of Imola, already acquired by Girolamo in right of his wife. Forlì is some sixteen miles to the south-east of the latter town, in the same rich and highly productive alluvial district, which lies between the Apennines and the Adriatic. It had long been under the dominion of its native lords, of the family of the Ordelaffi. The story of their ousting, with its episodes of poisoning, fighting, love-making, and plotting, though curious enough, would lead us too far away from our more immediate subject. Suffice it that the upshot was the same, as it was in so many other similar cases. The Pope declared that the old family had forfeited their rights, that the fief had devolved to the Holy See; and, accordingly, handed it over to his nephew-son.

* Infessura, apud Muratori, tom. iii. part ii. p. 1146.

† *Rer. Ital. Scrip.* Muratori, tom. xxiii. p. 111.

On the 8th of September in the same year Count Girolamo was solemnly made generalissimo of the Papal forces. The diarist Jacopo of Volterra* tells us how on that day, being the celebration of the nativity of the blessed Virgin, the Pope and all the College of Cardinals attended a solemn mass, in the course of which the Count in full armour knelt at the feet of the Pope, seated in front of the altar, and then and there received the staff of command, and the standard; and took the prescribed oaths, reading, says the historian, the whole formula at length himself;—truly the most arduous part of the matter in all probability to this “non literatus” *preux* chevalier. All Rome, both clerical and lay, was there, says gossiping Jacobus Volaterranus, as much to see the Count go through his part in the play, as to perform their devotions.

The picture of life in Rome at this period, obtainable from the inartistic matter-of-fact narrations of these diarists, the Jacopo just cited, Stefano Infessura, and one or two others of the same class, is a strange and striking one. Their ever-recurring accounts of solemnities, celebrations, and festivals, are chequered with notices almost equally frequent, and as calmly chronicled of such deeds and occurrences, as we are accustomed to hear reported from Sacramento, or San Francisco, and to consider as the product of a new and half-organised state of society. A noble patrician is stabbed to death, while sitting at the door of his own palace enjoying the evening air after supper. The name of the murderer and his motive are briefly told, and no further remark is made about the matter. A raid is made by one family against another and many

* Ap. Muratori, *Rer. Ital. Scrip.*, tom. xxiii. p. 112.

men are killed ; but none worth mentioning save one or two nobles. Of such matters nobody dreams of complaining. But when once on Ascension-day a great mass of people had assembled as usual in expectation of receiving the papal benediction, and Sixtus for some unassigned reason did not come forth to give it, there was great murmuring, and the multitude heaped bitter curses, we are told, on the Pontiff, who had defrauded them of his blessing.

The figures of the recently-married couple, however, with whose fortunes our story is more immediately concerned, appear most frequently, as might be expected, during those years of their prosperity on the bright squares of the chequered board. The Count, indeed, is found figuring in one strange and unpleasant scene a few days previous to his installation as commander-in-chief.

One of the Pope's nephews, Antonio Bassi, is lying grievously ill on his death-bed. His cousin Girolamo visits him the day before his death, and tries to comfort him "with fraternal words," and assurances that he will soon get well. But the dying man, either from the peevishness of suffering, says the chronicler,* or because he knew that he could now speak out with impunity what he had long felt, abused his powerful cousin in the most violent manner, "mentioning certain deeds of the Count universally condemned, and certain conduct of his reprobated by all men; on account of which, he said, the judgment of God, from which no human power could avail to protect him, would shortly fall on him. And in speaking of these things, he used a degree of vehemence which none of

* *Jacobus Volaterranus, Rer. Ital. Scrip., tom. xxiii. p. 109.*

those who knew him best had ever heard him speak with when in health." The Count, it seems, took it very quietly; but "we all standing round the bed blushed for shame at the scene, and several of us slunk away out of hearing." It would have been satisfactory to have been told what these so universally reprobated deeds and conduct were. Perhaps nephew Bassi would have liked some of the good things that were heaped on nephew Riario. There *was*, indeed, one dark topic, of which we shall have to speak presently, the indiscreet handling of which might well make discreet courtiers slink out of hearing, lest their ears should become the unwilling depositories of truths so carefully concealed that history, after nearly four hundred years of investigation, has failed in obtaining satisfactory evidence of them. Could it have been that the dying man felt himself so safe from earthly vengeance, and so beyond all considerations of worldly prudence, as to have dared to speak aloud in such a tone of the black Pazzi tragedy? If so, we know how dangerous it might have been to hear him. If so, could Girolamo Riario have been so unmoved by his upbraiding? Be it as it may, the above few hints, so fortuitously, as it seems, floating on the surface of the vast, black, all-devouring pool of oblivion, are all that we have to speculate on in the matter. Antonio Bassi died, and no "judgment" followed—yet awhile.

On the contrary, all sorts of festivities, mingling themselves with the more serious business of prosperous ambition, seem to have made up the life of the young Count and Countess. One constantly recurring cause of pomp and festival at Rome in those days, was the arrival in the eternal city of strangers of note from almost every part of Europe. English, German,

French, Spanish, Italian, Greek ambassadors, cardinals, or prelates, arrived in the great capital of Christianity to ask favours of Heaven's vicegerent; to plead their international or ecclesiastical causes and quarrels before him; to bring him gifts and compliments from distant potentates; to beg for assistance in money or money's worth; to obtain absolution for national sins committed against the Papal interest; or to secure aid and connivance for such as could be shown to square with it.

On the occasion of such arrivals, cardinals, with their numerous retinues of attendants, lay and clerical, used to go out to meet the strangers at the gate, and bring them in pomp to the lodgings prepared for them. Then followed grand ceremonial services in the basilicas, in which modern Circenses the Roman populace shared with delight, and vast banquets, shared only by the privileged of the earth. Now and then occur descriptions of gay doings of a less exclusive character, in which all classes of that strangely-variegated society are seen mingled in a more pleasing and more picturesque fashion.

On Wednesday,* the 22nd of March, 1480, for instance, Ernest, Duke of Saxony, arrives at Rome for the performance of a vow. He is accompanied by the Duke of Brunswick and other German nobles. All are clothed in black, with a staff embroidered in white across the breast, as a symbol of pilgrimage. The Pope and all the Sacred College go out to the Porta del Popolo to meet him; and fortunately we have among us two cardinals who can talk German. These ride one on each side of his Serene Highness, and thus

* Jac. Volat, *Rer. Ital. Scrip.*, tom. xxiii. p. 104.

the cortège of some two hundred horses of the Duke's retinue, together with all the trains of Pope and cardinals, sweep on through the streets of Rome towards St. Peter's. Sovereign princes coming to Rome in discharge of vows of pilgrimage are worthy of every encouragement. So Sixtus treats the noble stranger with all possible honour—even to the extent of allowing him to sit at mass and vespers on the bench of the cardinals, and in the stall next below the junior of those dignitaries, an honour rarely granted. Then, as is the case with those whom Rome delighteth to honour, he was presented in St. Peter's with the consecrated golden rose. But on this occasion, strangely enough, the golden rose was not a rose, but a golden oak-bough,* which Sixtus, contrary to all custom and precedent, had chosen to consecrate instead of the immemorially accustomed emblem. The substitution of this golden bough, the well-known heraldic bearing of the Della Rovere family, is a curious manifestation of the family feeling, which was so intense in Sixtus, and was the ever-present motive of all his crimes.

But the most pleasing of the doings in honour of the Elector recorded by the old diarist, is a grand hunting party given him by our Count Girolamo. It took place on the 10th of April, 1480, a day remembered by the people of Rome long afterwards, says Jacopo of Volterra. For the hunting took place only eight miles from the city, in the neighbourhood of the Fonte Malliane, to the south-west of Rome, and all classes of the citizens made holiday. Even the boys were able to join and enjoy the sport. The foreign princes themselves, with their retinue, all mounted on

* Note 7.

splendid horses, holding the hounds in leash, and shining, says the diarist, with gold and jewels, were the most interesting part of the sight to the populace. A very great quantity of stags and deer were taken, “and some beasts were captured by the hands of the princes themselves, *as if the creatures suffered themselves to be caught from the wish to contribute to the happiness of so great an occasion*”—a somewhat left-handed compliment to a sportsman, friend Jacopo, and savouring more of the antechamber than the greenwood. A more joyous scene, adds the diarist, cannot be imagined than that afforded by those hill-sides and woods thronged with eager sportsmen, and resounding far and near with the notes of the horns, the halloes of the hunters, the barking of the dogs, and the voices of singing and rejoicing. Then at the Fonte Malliane a magnificent banquet was prepared under the ilex woods of a shady hill-side, not for the invited guests only, but for all present. The Roman dames, with Catherine mistress of the revel, mingling in their brilliant and gorgeous-coloured * costume among the carousing knights, amid the dark-green verdure that shaded the hill-side, give what was wanted in colour to make the gay scene perfect. At respectful distance amid the surrounding woods, the Roman citizens are making the most of the rare opportunity; not less loud in their mirth, or less jovial over the good things provided at the cost of taxes drawn by the good Count from far-away provinces, than their masters. Their stalwart forms, clad in russet jerkin or hempen frock, mingled with hounds in leash, and richly-caparisoned horses, group well as seen among the trunks of the trees

* Note 8.

against the dark background of the ilex woods. "It is not to be told," says Jacopo, thus winding up his unusually detailed description, "how much those German chiefs, rejoicing after their own fashion, enjoyed themselves on that memorable day!" Is it intended, good Jacopo, by those words of yours, "*Germani illi proceres letantes more suo*," that we should catch a glimpse of our Teuton friends riding back the eight miles into Rome rather less steadily than they sat on those tall horses of theirs in the morning?

Four days afterwards, at any rate, the Elector and his company are ready to start on their homeward journey; and the Pope, as a parting gift, presents them with wax candles blessed by his own holy fingers: "so that, accompanied by such holy things, they might reach their own country in safety without any ill encounters by the way."

Thus, amid honours, pleasures, and the agreeable business arising out of her large share in the administration of Papal favour, passed four brilliant years of the heyday prime of Catherine's life. Was there no darker woof to chequer the bright web—no shading to so much sunlight? That terrible death-bed scene, when Girolamo's cousin, Antonio Bassi, lay a-dying, has led us already to the mention of the dark story of the Pazzi murders. This celebrated episode of Florentine history, which has been made again and again the novelist's and poet's as well as the historian's subject, is too well known for it to be necessary to do more here than briefly recapitulate the familiar facts, especially as the present story is only concerned with the question, how far the Riarii were implicated in them.

On Easter day, the 26th of April, 1478, Lorenzo de Medici, afterwards "the Magnificent," and his brother

Giuliano were, while at worship before the high altar of the Cathedral, stabbed by the daggers of assassins—Lorenzo inefficiently, Giuliano mortally. Francesco de Pazzi and his adherents were the murderers. A Salviati, Archbishop of Pisa, was also one of the conspirators, to whom had been assigned the part of seizing the Palazzo Pubblico while the others did the murder. The daggers of the assassins, however, having done only half their work, and the populace of Florence showing themselves in no wise inclined to rise against the Medici, or make any demonstration in favour of the conspirators, the game was lost. Francesco and the numerous family of the Pazzi were almost wholly exterminated; and the stout republicans of Florence, having no fear of the Church before their eyes, hung the Archbishop Salviati out of a window of the Palazzo Pubblico in a very summary manner.

Now, that the great Florentine family of the Pazzi should hate, worry, and conspire against the great Florentine family of the Medici, was as intelligible, as much according to the habitudes of the place and time, and as natural, as that one butcher's mastiff should fly at the throat of another. And if the deed of that Easter Sunday had involved no other persons in its causes and consequences, than the Medici and the Pazzi, the destruction of the losing party would have been the natural ending and completion of the story. But, in the first place, an Archbishop had been publicly hung in Florence;—a deed more difficult to be wiped out, than the blood of scores of laymen, whether Medici or Pazzi. And, in the second place, the municipal and commercial rivalry and hatred of those two families had been exasperated and put into fatal action by being involved with the yet more culpable hatred of the

Riarii for the rival parvenu princes of the Medicean race. Both Medici and Pazzi were bankers in Rome. The former had held the lucrative appointment of treasurers to the Apostolic chamber. Sixtus IV. took this from them, and gave it to the Pazzi. These were friends and allies of the Riarii. And there seems no reason to doubt the assertion of the Florentine writers, that Girolamo was one of the conspirators, if not the original contriver of the whole scheme.

The Pope launched his interdict against Florence, in punishment for the execution of the Archbishop; and followed up this spiritual attack by a less formidable secular one. The republicans were able to defend themselves against the latter; but were obliged by the former tremendous weapon to humiliate themselves before the Papal throne. It is clear enough, in short, that all the sympathies of the Pope after the deed were with the perpetrators of it. Was he a consenting and abetting party to it before the fact? This is a question, which has occupied the attention and investigations of historians, anxious to decide the matter according to their respective prepossessions, more perhaps than its importance deserves. One more crime, however dark, added to the list of those which history has heaped up at the door of the *Servi servorum*, can effect but little any of the vexed questions raised between the defenders and the accusers of Popes and Papacy. A synod of the Tuscan prelates, which met in July of the year 1478, solemnly accused Sixtus of having instigated the murder. The Florentine historians are nearly unanimous in making the same accusation. And most of the arguments on the point have been based on consideration of this testimony. But we have less suspected evidence to the same purpose in the direct

assertion of Stefano Infessura, the Roman diarist. Having briefly told the circumstances and upshot of the attempt, he adds : * “ These things were ordered by Pope Sixtus, together with the Count Girolamo, and others, to take away the dominion [of Florence] from Lorenzo de Medici, and give it to the Count Girolamo.” A moment’s consideration of the mode in which Sixtus and his son, or nephew, Girolamo, worked in concert and pulled together during the whole of his papacy for the founding and advancement of the family greatness, and a little reflection on the perfect confidence and community of aims and wishes existing between them, will add all the weight which extreme probability can give to the opinion that the Pope was one of the conspirators.

But then arises the question more nearly touching the subject of these pages ; What guilty knowledge may Catherine have had of her husband’s crime ? Did the young bridegroom, within the first year of his married life, take counsel with his girl-wife, at that time within a few weeks of having become for the first time a mother at sixteen years of age, respecting this deed of blood to be done for the furthering of their mutual greatness ? Did he seek to gratify her ambition,—certainly no less worldly, less gross in quality, or less a ruling passion than his own,—and obtain her admiring smiles by laying at the proud beauty’s feet these high hopes to be realised at the price of a daring deed ? Or, when returning from dark plottings with priests and desperate men in the most secret council closet of the Papal palace to the brilliant home of his young wife, did he mutter Macbeth-like, “ Be innocent of the

* *Rer. Ital. Scrip.*, tom. iii. par. ii. p. 1146.

knowledge, dearest chuck, till thou applaud the deed"? No written word survives to throw the least light on this question. And each reader must judge of the probabilities of the case according to his knowledge and theories of human character. It was certainly Riario's practice, as we shall see, to take counsel of his wife in state matters of less unlawful kind. And thoroughly does she seem to have been capable of seconding and aiding in all the rough business that might fall to the hand of a stirring and ambitious prince in those unquiet times;—truly a help-meet for one who had to hold his own by craft in the council-chamber, as well as by energy and valour in the field. Certainly, bearing in mind the character of the times, and the character of the women, there can be small doubt, that had Catherine found herself called to queen it in fair Florence, she would have "applauded the deed," that placed her there. . . . Yet at sixteen, and at this period of her life at all events, (however much we may at a later time find her wholly busied in virile struggles for power and supreme rule), occupied with the more womanly and more holy cares of wife and mother-hood, it may be fairly hoped that she was innocent of this black guilt, despite the nearness of her connection with Heaven's vicegerent!

During these four years in Rome, Catherine presented her husband with three children. The first was a disappointment to the ambitious pair. Bianca, a daughter, born in March, 1478, was greeted, we may be sure, with scant welcome. But on the 1st of September, 1479, the long-sighted—yet so short-seeing—hopes of the parents and of the Pontiff were gratified by the birth of a son, christened Ottaviano. And on the 24th of

August, 1480, a second son, named Cesare, was born to them.

At length, in the summer of 1481, some brief pause in the business of sharing the Papal councils, making and breaking of leagues, persecuting the Colonnas, and entertaining ambassadors, made it possible for Girolamo and his wife to visit for the first time their dominions of Forlì and Imola. There were to be grand doings in Rome on the 30th of June, 1481. The Pope in grand gala, and with much ceremony and great rejoicings, was to bless the fleet, now coming up from Ostia to the city. There were to be feasts, candles, processions, and other such like "divine services," with "Florentine ambassador washing the Pope's hands at the beginning of the sacred rites; Venetian ambassadors washing them in the middle, and the Prefect of Rome at the end of the same;"* and drink and Papal blessings distributed to all comers.

But, despite all these attractions, Girolamo and Catherine with their retinue left Rome at daybreak on that day. It caused great surprise, says the chronicler, that they should not have chosen, at the cost of one day's delay, to be present at all these gay doings. But it was understood that that special day and hour had been indicated to him as fortunate for his journey, by the planets.

* *Rer. Ital. Scrip.*, tom. xxiii. p. 137.

CHAPTER IV.

From Rome to Forlì with bag and baggage.—First presentation of a new lord and lady to their lieges.—Venice again shows a velvet paw to a second Riario.—Saffron-hill in brocade and ermine.—Sad conduct on the part of our lieges.—Life in Rome again.—“Orso ! Orso !—Colonna ! Colonna !”—A Pope’s hate, and a Pope’s vengeance.—Sixtus finally loses the game.

JOURNEYS in the fifteenth century were important undertakings,—especially journeys of women and children. But this expedition of the Count Girolamo and his family was a very serious affair indeed. His departure from Rome resembled a veritable exodus. For he determined on transporting to Forlì, not only the whole of his numerous establishment of servants and retainers of all kinds, but also all his immense wealth in goods and chattels of all sorts. This kind of property formed a very much larger part of a rich man’s substance in those times, than it does in these days of public debts and investments in all kinds of industrial undertakings. A rich man’s wealth in the fifteenth century consisted of large masses of hoarded coin,—very much smaller in numerical amount, however, than the sums with which the traders and men of property of our day are daily conversant,—of horses, and long trains of richly caparisoned mules,—of large quantities of silks and other rich stuffs, both for clothing and furniture,—of arms and armour,—of jewels, and gold and silver plate,—and of the various other articles of household

plenishing. In all such things the Count Riario, who had inherited all those rich possessions of his spendthrift brother the Cardinal, which, we are assured,* were for their quantity and magnificence one of the wonders of that age, was rich beyond any other individual of his contemporaries. And all this vast mass of miscellaneous property he now carried with him from Rome to Forlì.†

For eight days ‡ the long road by Orte, Terni, Spoleto to Perugia, and thence over rough and picturesque Apennine passes to Ancona, and so through the flat and rich plains of Romagna to the distant provincial city, was thronged with beasts of burden and vehicles, and the servants and men-at-arms guarding them. As far as the eye could reach from the highest tower-top in Forlì over the straight dusty line of the ancient Via Emilia, long strings of laden mules, and carts, might be seen labouring onwards under the July sun, and, at length, slowly passing under the city gateway into the welcome shade of the narrow streets. Each mule load was covered with an embroidered cloth, showing the arms of Rovere and Sforza ; and was bound with silken cords ; and each cart similarly protected. For eight days the citizens of Forlì watched with ever-increasing wonder the arrival within their little city of all this wealth ; and congratulated themselves on belonging to a master, whose riches, they trusted, would have the effect of making him less extortionate towards his new subjects.

At Rome, meanwhile, much gossip and speculation was excited by this departure of Girolamo, with bag

* Bonoli, p. 213.

† Jac. Volter., *Rer. Ital. Scrip.*, tom. xxiii. p. 140.

‡ Burriel, p. 50.

and baggage; men observed, and whispered to each other, that Sixtus was growing old, and was latterly much broken. Some went so far as to assert, that his death had been foretold as to occur in the July or August of that year.* At all events, the Pontiff could not be expected to survive many years. And Rome, always a turbulent and dangerous place for wealthy men during the lawless interval between the death of one Pope and the election of his successor, would be like to be especially so to the immoderately enriched kinsman of a very much hated Pontiff. It was surmised, accordingly, that the prudent Count judged it to be time to think of abandoning a falling house, and preparing himself to ride out the storms which were sure to follow the death of Sixtus, in the comparatively safe anchorage of the provincial city he had made his own, during the hay-making time of Papal sunshine.

Catherine and her husband reached Forlì on the 15th of July, 1481, having been preceded by their children and goods. Prepared by all they had witnessed during the previous eight days, to expect something very magnificent, indeed, when their hitherto unseen lord should at length make his appearance, the citizens of Forlì did their utmost to welcome their young sovereigns. Nor, as it appears from the details of their festal entry preserved to us,† were the young couple less anxious to impress their subjects favourably. All the youth of both sexes, dressed uniformly in white, and bearing olive branches in their hands, went out to meet them, headed by the clergy and magistrates, in full canonicals and robes of office. On meeting this

* Jac. Volter., *Rer. Ital. Scrip.*, tom. xxiii. p. 140.

† Burriel, p. 51.

procession, the Count and Countess descended from their horses, and received their greetings standing. Catherine, we are told, had decked herself for the occasion in the most magnificent gala dress she possessed, and had put on all her most precious pearls and diamonds. "Her mind and intellect being filled moreover with the choicest Roman manners," says Burriel, "and joining to these her own elegance, and select and polished diction, and dexterously taking care, moreover, that the dazzling beauty of her personal perfections was not hidden from the spectators," she made conquest at first sight of the eyes and hearts of the Forlivesi.

Girolamo also did his best to make his entry as imposing as possible; and came attended on his journey by a party of the first nobles in Rome. It is very curious, and strikingly indicative of the degree to which Papal splendour outshone all other splendour in the old capital of the world, and Papal favour lifted the objects of it, be they what they might, far above all other grandeurs and greatnesses, however proud, during the brief period of a Pope's incumbency, to find this low-born kinsman of a mendicant friar attended on his journey by a Colonna,* two princes of the Orsini, one of the great Savelli family, and others of the oldest patrician families of Rome.

Inside the city every sort of revelry prevailed for three days. In the principal square of Forlì, admirably adapted, say the Forlì writers, for such purposes, from its handsome regularity and ample size, a tournament was held, in which the Roman princes condescended to run a course; and then a vast wooden

* Vecchiazzani, *Historia di Forlimpopoli* (Rimini, 1647), vol. ii. p. 153; Bonoli, *Storia di Forlì*, p. 210.

castle, constructed in the middle of the square for this purpose, was besieged and defended by two parties of the townsfolk, with a reward from the Count to the first of the besieging party who should enter it; a distinction cheaply won by a Forlì youth, at the cost of an eye poked out by the zeal of the defenders.

Then there was a magnificent ball, in which the Count and Countess led off the dance, followed first by the Roman guests, and then by all the "beau monde" of Forlì. The chronicler, Leon Cobelli, who is recorded to have been also a painter, musician, and ballet-master, was there playing on his rebeck at the Count's elbow; and winds up his account of the festival by saying that he had never seen such a ball, and never should again in his days.

There were, of course, triumphal arches, allegorical paintings, cunning carpentry devices moving by unseen means, eating, drinking, and speechifying, in prose and verse, to a wonderful extent. "And charming it was to see the Lady Countess and all her damsels come forth in different magnificent dresses every day for a whole week, and the great buffets, ten feet high, in the banqueting hall of the palace, loaded every day with a fresh service of silver and gold."* Every room in the palace, too, was hung with tapestry, "however large, and however irregular in form."

But the crowning joy of all was, when, on the occasion of receiving the homage of the city, offered in "a very elegant oration by Dr. Guido Peppi, a perfect master not only of the vulgar tongue, but of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew," † the gracious Count was pleased to remit the corn duties to his loving subjects of

* Bonoli, p. 213; Burriel, p. 54.

† Burriel, p. 52.

Forlì. Yet while relinquishing this important source of revenue, the new sovereigns, at the same time, undertook various expensive works for the amelioration and improvement of their cities of Forlì and Imola. At the former, the strong fortress of Ravaldino, commenced by the preceding dynasty, was carried to completion. The palace was enlarged and newly ornamented. The public square was adorned with new buildings and handsome porticoes. Schools were established both there and at Imola. In the latter city, such portions as had been built of mud were destroyed, and rebuilt of stone. The public square was enlarged and beautified, the paving of the streets improved, and an Academy of Fine Arts instituted.* In short, the young sovereigns seem to have been really anxious for the well-being of the people committed to their rule; and to have started at least with some idea of having duties to perform, and some intention of performing them.†

After thus winning golden opinions in Forlì, Girolamo and Catherine left that city for their other capital, Imola, on the 12th of August; having sojourned among the Forlivesi a little less than a month. There a similar welcome, and similar gala doings on a somewhat smaller scale, awaited them. There also their time was as busily occupied in making beneficent arrangements for the improvement of the town, and in striving to obtain the affections of their subjects; and their stay as short. For Girolamo was called away from these duties and interests more properly his own, by the necessity of attending to affairs of the Pope, which made it necessary for him

* Alberghetti, Storia della Città d'Imola, p. 251.

† Burriel, p. 55.

to visit Venice. For this purpose he left Imola together with Catherine, on the 2nd of September, after a stay there of three weeks only.

All Italy was filled with uneasy suspicions and jealousies at this visit of the Pope's nephew, favourite, general and right-hand-man-in-ordinary to the powerful republic. Every little court was on thorns, and had spies on the alert to ascertain if possible the object and the degree of success attending the move. All sorts of things were suspected, asserted, and chattered of by these busy gentry; and subsequent historians have had to pick a somewhat thorny path amid their contradictory statements.* The most probable, and indeed scarcely doubtful explanation of the matter seems, however, sufficiently simple.

The Turks were in possession of Otranto. The Turkish raids were the constant terror and bugbear of Italy in these centuries, as were those of the Danes to our own island at an earlier period. Like the Danish inroads too to our monarchs, the aggressions of the Turks were sometimes a motive, and constantly a pretext to the popes for raising troops and money, and requiring the assistance of the other states of Italy. The Venetians had in the year before granted no such aid to Sixtus against the infidels. To obtain the promise of such now from the Signory was the avowed motive of the Count's visit. But no Italian potentate ever believed anything that was avowed. Besides, whenever the Pope was bent on hiding the real causes of movements, whose true scope was some iniquitous spoliation or ambitious scheme, he always had the Turks in his mouth.

* Burriel, p. 75.

Now for the real motive. Hercules, Duke of Ferrara, had quarrelled with the Venetians. He was also in disgrace with Sixtus. In the war, which had ensued between the Pope and Florence, in consequence of the Pazzi affair, and the hanging of the Archbishop of Pisa, Duke Hercules had accepted the place of General on the Florentine side. For which highly irreligious conduct, Heaven's vicar had excommunicated him, and declared him deprived of his dukedom. Hercules of Ferrara however declared, that excommunicated he might be, but that Duke of Ferrara he would live and die by the grace of his own right arm.

The business in hand therefore between Sixtus and the Republic was first to unite their force for the destruction of this audacious rebel, and then to decide who was to have the spoil. The Republic said they would have Ferrara;—and meant it. The Pope said that it should belong to the Church; but meant, that it should fall to the lot of Girolamo, and form the main pillar of that edifice of family greatness, for which Sixtus lived and laboured.

But in stating the high policy of princes with this naked brutality,—into which the necessity of brevity has betrayed the writer—there is a danger, that perverse and ill-constituted idiosyncrasies may picture to themselves Counts, high and mighty Signors, and even Heaven's Vicegerent himself under the figure and similitude of some Bill Sikes, Artful Dodger, and reverend Fagin contending with mutually deceptive intentions respecting some equally nobly won booty. It becomes the historian therefore to lose no time in having recourse to those means, which the time-honoured practice and general consent of the world have appointed for the decorous draping and nobilitating

similar passages of history. Bill Sikes in Doge's bonnet and ermine cloak, a venerable Fagin duly tiara-ed and apostolically elected, and an Artful Dodger in knightly guise, with a lovely and brilliant she-dodger by his side, gracefully going through decorous festivities in ducal halls in the midst of admiring satellites, will offend no proprieties.

Hasten we then to the all-potent upholstery, which decently differences the monarch and the burglar.

Of these Venetian festivities, it so happens, that our old Roman friend Jacopo of Volterra has left us the account of an eye-witness. Taking a rare holiday from diary-writing in the capital of the world, he had gone, he tells us,* to visit certain relations at Lucca. And thence, led by the desire of seeing the world, "videndi studio," he visited Bologna, Ferrara, and Padua. In the latter city he heard that the Count Girolamo and his noble lady had just arrived at Venice, having passed not by the route of Padua, but by Comacchio and the marshes, for the sake of avoiding Ferrara. So our curious Jacopo, who like a gad-about gossip as he was, could not resist the temptation of being present on such an occasion, left his horses with the innkeeper at Padua; and hiring a boat on the Brenta, sailed for Venice—"Navigavi Venetias."

The day after his arrival was Sunday, on which day at noon "the noble Virgins of Venice, to the number of an hundred and thirty-two, all, if not equally beautiful, equally loaded with gems, gold, and pearls, offered the Count, in the great hall of the ducal palace, a most magnificent spectacle, worthy of being remembered throughout all time." Giovanni

* *Rer. Ital. Script.*, tom. xxiii. p. 242.

Mocenigo, the Doge, sat on a lofty dais between Girolamo and Catherine. All the nobility of Venice were ranged tier above tier around the hall, in such numbers, that Jacopo never remembered having seen such an assembly even at Rome, except on occasion of the jubilee. Dancing was kept up till it was dark. Then white wax-candles were lighted in such numbers that night became more brilliant than day. Games of various kinds were then exhibited till the fourth hour after sunset. Then the feasting began—feasting of which it was difficult to say whether quantity or quality were the more wonderful! The women's dresses, "*ut a peritis intelligo*,"—as I am given to understand by such as are up in such matters, were estimated to be worth three hundred thousand gold pieces.

Other particulars of the doings at Venice on this occasion, and of the great honour shown to the Count by the Signory, have been preserved in a letter* by the Archdeacon of Forlì, to Lorenzo de' Medici, from the tone of which it should seem that, although in the suite of his sovereign, his real business at Venice was to act as spy for Lorenzo. This good Archdeacon tells his correspondent that it cannot be denied that the Signory have treated the Count in the most distinguished manner, that any prince was ever treated by them in the memory of man. He relates how forty noble citizens were sent to meet him at Malamocco; how the Senators themselves, with the Doge on board the Bucentaur, and an hundred and fifteen noble ladies to do honour to the Countess Catherine, came out to St. Clement in the Lagoon, two miles from Venice, and escorted him into the city, with every possible

* Printed by Fabroni, in his life of Lorenzo, from the original in the Florentine archives.

mark of respect and rejoicing; how the Doge received him the next day standing at the foot of the Giant's staircase; how he had been created "Gentilhuomo di Venezia;" and how the Senate had assembled and proceeded in his presence to transact certain business, in order that he might see their mode of procedure. Notwithstanding all which, adds this traitor Archdeacon, and clever spy, "I am certain that this visit has produced no fruit, which need give umbrage to your Lordship, or our other friends. Nor am I by any means sorry that it has taken place; as I know, that despite all this show of respect, the Count has seen here certain things, which have been discouraging to him rather than otherwise."

And, indeed, the experience of his brother the Cardinal's visit to Venice, and its results, ought to have been sufficient to warn Girolamo, that the grave Senators of the Republic were not unwont to laugh in their sleeves, while fooling vain young courtiers to the top of their bent with all sorts of external honours and gala-making, and sending them away wholly unsped, as regarded the substantial objects of their mission. How far Count Girolamo, and Catherine on whose counsel, we are told, he relied much on occasion of this visit to Venice, having taken her thither for the express purpose of availing himself of it, were contented with the result of their negotiations, we have no means of knowing, though Burriel undertakes to say, that he was highly dissatisfied. But it will be seen in the sequel, that Lorenzo's correspondent, the Archdeacon, had found the means of arriving at a very correct opinion of the real intentions of the Venetian statesmen.

The Count and Countess reached Imola on their

return on the 23rd of September, and remained there till the 9th of October. While still busy there, according to the historians, in making various provisions for the amelioration of their territories and the benefit of their subjects, they received news from Forli of the discovery of a dangerous conspiracy for the purpose of restoring the dynasty of the Ordelaffi. The conspirators proposed to assassinate Girolamo on his journey from Imola to Forli; and then with the help of the Lord of Faenza, who was an uncle of the banished Ordelaffi, of the Lord of Bologna, and above all of Lorenzo de' Medici, who had by no means forgotten the ill turn he owed the Riarii, to secure the city for its ancient masters.

It is upon the occasion of this conspiracy that we learn, for the first time, from the reluctant admission of the historians, that two others having the same object had already been crushed by the vigilance of Francesco Tolentino, governor of Forli, in the course of the year 1480, before the new sovereign had yet visited his principality. On both these occasions the clergy implicated in them had been exiled for a while, and the laymen hung in the orthodox manner.* And now the turbulent artisans of Forli are trying again the same desperate game. The only consolation to the feelings of the injured sovereigns, was to be found in the fact, says Burriel, that no noble was engaged in the affair. Happily our vigilant Tolentino has the leaders of the conspiracy safe in the fort of Ravaldino before any mischief is done, beyond the painful effect of so much ingratitude on the feelings of the gracious sovereigns.

The historians are diffuse in indignant moralising

* Note 9.

on this "ingratitude," and perverseness. It seems true, indeed, that Girolamo and Catherine showed themselves inclined to govern according to the best extant lights of state-craft. But these writers omit to remember, that the Riarii were usurpers; and that the ousted family, and old familiar name, with its three centuries of history clinging round it, now represented by two young men, known to the Forlì artisans only by their unmerited misfortunes, were sure in absence and exile to be remembered with affection, and associated with a thousand "good-old-times" recollections, more potent over the minds of ignorantly patriotic burghers, than modern fiscal reforms. The Ordelaffi pretenders have no biographers except their enemies; and we must trust therefore to our imaginations for their view of these recurring conspiracies.

The Count and Countess hastened to Forlì on hearing these tidings from Tolentino. All danger was however over; and Girolamo with magnanimous clemency—much praised by his biographer—gave orders that no vengeance should be inflicted . . . till after he had left Forlì.

This he immediately did, starting for Rome with Catherine on the 14th of October. And ten days afterwards, the good people of Forlì received the necessary lesson from the sight of four corpses dangling from as many windows of the *Palazzo Pubblico*.

The second residence in Rome, which followed this return in October, 1481, was characterised by events of a very different kind from those which had imparted so festive a character to those first four years. In the early days of his Papacy, the efforts of Sixtus to turn his elevation to account in the only manner in which it was valuable to him, had been crowned with success by

the establishment of his son—or nephew—as prince of the third-rate states of Forlì and Imola. The bolder attempt, which followed, to acquire for him the dominion of Florence at the expense of so much black and odious guilt had, as has been seen, not only failed, but had entailed on Italy two years of war. And now the same undying ambition and insatiable avarice was driving him into the still greater misfortunes, which resulted from his endeavours to appropriate the dukedom of Ferrara.

Though much discontented with Girolamo's failure in the object of his visit to Venice, in as much as the Signory, while giving him abundance of fair words, had steadily evaded any engagement as to relinquishing their pretensions to Ferrara, when its Duke should be driven out by their joint forces, Sixtus, nevertheless, determined on continuing his alliance with them, in the hope that, when the prey was hunted down, he might find the means of appropriating it to himself. The Venetian Senators were doubtless guided in their secret counsels by similar considerations.

Every effort was at first made at Rome to conceal the existence of such an understanding; and the Pope was in public loud in his abuse of the Republic. But Ferdinand, the crafty and cautious old King of Naples, was not to be taken in by any such means. And the first consequence of the Pope's policy was the necessity of sending troops with Girolamo at their head to the Neapolitan frontier to oppose the hostile movements of the Neapolitans, who, under the command of Alfonzo, the King's son, threatened to force their way through the Roman states, for the purpose of going to the assistance of the Duke of Ferrara. Most of the other states of Italy, as usual, joined in the quarrel; the

greater potentates for the protection of their own, or the hope of acquiring new dominions; and the lesser, as usual, in the capacity of mercenaries and "condottieri" captains. Thus all Italy was in a state of war and confusion.

In order to meet Alfonzo with as powerful a force as possible, Girolamo sent to his trusty governor, Tolentino, to come from Forlì, and bring with him as strong a band of Forlivesi as he could raise. The Bishop Magnani was appointed governor in his absence.* But his reverence, frightened at the remembrance of former conspiracies, and seeing ground of suspicion in everything, so used his authority, imprisoning, confiscating, and racking the lieges, even to death, right and left, that the commander of the fortress, after fruitlessly remonstrating with the bishop, wrote to Girolamo, that if he wished to preserve his position in Forlì, he must lose no time in putting a stop to the proceedings of his churchman governor. So Tolentino had to be sent back in a hurry.

At length, on the 21st of August, 1482, Girolamo at the head of the Papal troops, and the celebrated "condottiere," Robert Malatesta, at the head of the Venetians, gave battle to the Neapolitans near Velletri, and won a victory over them. The success, such as it was, produced no very important or decisive consequences; but of course the utmost was made of it at Rome. Girolamo marched into the city in triumph, and prisoners and standards were paraded and presented to his lady Countess, who must have felt, thinks Burriel, that this was the happiest day in her life. It may well be doubted, however, whether Catherine felt much

* Burriel, p. 103.

happiness on the occasion, though she no doubt played her sovereign part before the public eye as well on that day as on so many others. She had little cause for happiness. Things were not looking well for her and hers in those days. News had recently been received of the siege of Forlì by some of the allies of the Duke of Ferrara; and though the attack had been beaten off, mischief had been done: there was expense to be incurred, and future danger to be feared.

Rome itself, moreover, was by no means a place to be happy in during these latter years of Sixtus IV.'s Papacy. The scarcity of all necessaries was extreme, the distress very great, and the discontent threatening. A large portion of the Papal force, however much needed in the field, was obliged to be retained in Rome for fear of a rising of the people. Wine was hardly to be procured. Many taverns were shut up, from absolute impossibility of obtaining food and drink to offer their customers.* Grain was at an unprecedented price; and the bakers were compelled, under pain of fine and imprisonment, to purchase their supplies at granaries established by the Pope, for the storing of inferior corn imported by him at a low price from Naples, and sold at an enormous profit. And the bread made from this grain, says Infessura,† “was black, stinking, and abominable, eaten only from necessity, and the cause of much disease.”

Another misfortune was the death of the great soldier Robert Malatesta, who survived his Velletri victory only fifteen days. He died in Rome, in all probability of fever caused by his exertions in the battle.

* Il Notario di Nantiporto. Ap. Rer. Ital. Script., tom. iii. par. 2, p. 1183.

† Rer. Ital. Script., tom. iii. par. 2, p. 1183.

But public rumour, as usual, spoke of poison, and attributed his death to Girolamo's jealousy of his share in the command of the forces. Such accusations are of interest only as indicative of the motives which the public mind of the time deemed with probability attributable to its great men, and of the deeds which were considered likely to have been perpetrated.

He was buried in the church of St. Peter with all honour, "with sixty-four torches and many banners and many standards, of which one bore his arms and this motto: '*Veni, vidi, vici; victoriam Sixto dedi; Mors invidit gloriæ*;' and a catafalque as if he had been a pope."* The more mordant contemporary diarist, Infessura, in recording these funeral honours, writes that once upon a time Siena having been liberated from the Florentines by some great captain, the Sieneese were at a great loss what honours and recompense to award him. Whereupon a citizen rose and said, "Let us put him to death, and then worship him as a saint, and so make him our perpetual protector;" which was accordingly done. "Now, it is said—not that I altogether believe it," honestly adds Infessura, who bitterly hated Sixtus—"that the Pope imitated these Sieneese in the matter of Malatesta's death and the honours shown to his dead body."

Many curious indications of the strange disorder and wretched state of Rome during these years may be gleaned from the prolix daily notices of these laborious old diarists.

On the 23rd of January, 1483, died "the poor old Cardinal de Rohan, who was robbed in life and robbed in death. For just before his death, Messer Bernardo

* Not. di Nantiporto. Ap. Rer. Ital. Script., tom. iii. par. 2, p. 1183.

de' Massimi" (a scion of a princely house!) "broke into his dwelling through the church of St. Apollinare, and robbed it of thirty thousand ducats' worth of richly wrought plate, with which he got clear off to Venice. And when the body was being carried to his burial, the friars of St. Augustin fought with the friars of Santa Maria Maggiore for certain gold brocade with which the corpse was covered, and belaboured each other with the torches. And then there was such a row that swords were drawn, and the rings that the corpse had on its fingers and the mitre on its head were stolen."

Here is another queer little picture furnished by the same anonymous "Notary of Nantiporto :"

One of the great Savelli family, the Signor Mariano, is a prisoner in St. Angelo. One night, the 25th of July, 1483, the cardinal-governor of the castle, the constable and other authorities are supping in the garden behind the fortress; and after supper sit playing cards till three in the morning. While they are thus engaged, Signor Mariano contrives to escape from the prison. At four A. M., armed men are searching all Rome for him, in vain; for he is safe out of the city. A bad business for the convives of that pleasant supper and card party; for that same day, Pope Sixtus, who does not like his prisoners to escape him, goes in person and in a great passion to St. Angelo, "and stayed there almost the whole day, and drove out the governor and the constable and the whole of the rest of the party."

Shortly afterwards we have the following anecdote preserved for us by Stefano Infessura :

A certain youth, one Messer Gianantonio di Parma, a deformed hunchback, and "monster of a man,"

grossly ignorant besides, and of infamous character, had paid down two hundred and fifty ducats to Count Girolamo, and promised a thousand to the Pope for a place. So Sixtus sends this promising youth to the Auditors of the Rota, the highest, most learned, and most respected legal body in Rome, with orders to admit him at once as one of their number! The members of that court demurred; humbly pointing out that it was contrary to all law and custom to appoint as Auditor of the Rota one not qualified by the usual preparatory degrees and examinations. The Pope, in reply, ordered a body of guards to march down to the court, and take all the members prisoners. But that grave and learned body, having received notice of what was coming, quickly broke up their sitting, and “stole off secretly, every man to his own house, not by the direct way, but by Trastevere, for fear of being caught and taken to prison.” Hereupon Messer Gianantonio, baulked of his place, demanded his two hundred and fifty ducats back again from the Count. But it by no means suited that magnanimous Prince to refund. So he angrily answered that the money had been an unconditional gift! In which characteristic story, it is doubtful whether the Pope’s audacious attempt, in despite of all law, decency, and reason, or the apparent ease with which the Papal vengeance was escaped, is the more strange.

But nothing is more curiously indicative of the disjointed state of society, and general disorder prevailing in these times, than the frequent apparent powerlessness of rulers wielding despotic authority to do as they would with things immediately, as it should seem, beneath their hand. Nothing works regularly. Appointed forces abdicate their functions; and the

position of the baulked autocrat puts one in mind of that of the old woman of the nursery rhyme: "Fire won't burn rope,—rope won't hang man;" and the despot can't get over the small stile that impedes the path of his wishes. The immediate instruments of the tyrant's will, act as if he were a bad child or dangerous madman. If his orders can be evaded, or escaped from for the day, it is probable that the morrow may find him busy with some new freak of power. As there is no inviolable law, there is no certain line of demarcation between the criminal and the correct citizen. And all the mass of society is prepared to oppose at least such inert resistance as it can with safety, to the unreasonable will of an unrespected master.

Another curious trait of manners has been preserved by two of the diarists so frequently cited.* Girolamo had besieged and driven out the Colonnas from one of their castles in the neighbourhood of Rome. This achievement was of course made much of in the city; and a young painter, one Antonio, son of Giuliano, made the bombardment the subject of a picture. All the fight was, we are told, painted to the life with its various incidents and episodes. But in one corner of the picture, the painter, in one of those whimsical moods so often indulged in by the artists of that day, had represented † a lady in closer conversation with a Franciscan friar than was consistent with strict propriety. The painting was talked of; and to the poor painter's great delight, the Pope desired to see it. Sixtus was at first much pleased; but then observing the

* Notario di Nantiporto. *Rer. Ital. Script.*, tom. iii. par. 2, p. 1087.—*Infessura*, same volume, p. 1178.

† Note 10.

two figures above mentioned, he took it into his head that the lady was intended to represent the Countess Catherine. Whereupon, without further ado, he ordered the painter to be put on the rack, and then hung,—his house to be sacked, and all his and his father's substance confiscated. All of which was done, except the hanging, for which exile was substituted, on the pretext that the offender was little better than crazy.

The constant cause, however, of the worst and most frequent of the disorders that then rendered Rome little better than a den of outlaws and anarchy, was the great feud between the Colonnas and the Orsini, in which the Pope and Girolamo warmly espoused the side of the latter. No pretext was too flimsy, no injustice too flagrant, no violence too lawless, for these rulers to commit, in pursuit of the utter ruin of the hated family.

At length, on the 29th of March, 1484, there was "such work in Rome, as I never saw the like in my day,"* says the Notary of Nantiporto. All the Orsini and Girolamo Riario with them, armed themselves for a night attack on the palaces of the Colonnas, with the especial purpose of destroying the Protonotary Colonna, the head of that family. They, well knowing of the intended attack, which was in no wise kept secret, made the best preparations for defence that they could, barricading the streets with loads of hay and beams, &c. Thus, during that whole day, "Rome was in great trouble, and every one was in arms." Every body made their own dwelling as secure as possible; and "I," says the Notary, "put two carts full of stones

* Notario di Nantiporto. *Rer. Ital. Script.*, tom. iii p. 2, p. 1084.

before my door, and shored it up well with beams, and did the same to the windows; and all night long I heard them crying on the bridge, 'Orso! Orso! Chiesa! Chiesa!' with much sounding of trumpets, and continual discharges of fire-arms."

The magistrates of Rome, the "Conservatori," the Senators, the "Caporioni," and many notable citizens, went to the Pope in the midst of the tumult, to endeavour to bring about a pacification. But the fierce and vindictive old man would hear of no terms of submission or reconciliation till the Protonotary should give himself up into his hands. There was little doubt what would be the result of such a step. But the Colonna, seeing that it was the only chance of appeasing the storm that threatened to destroy his whole race, at length declared that he would go to the Pope. The other members of his family, however, would not permit him to do so; but determined that he should pass the night in the house of the Cardinal Colonna, his kinsman.

That night, after a regular bombardment, in the course of which many lives were lost on both sides, the houses both of the Cardinal and the Protonotary were taken by assault, and given up to pillage. The dwellings of many private citizens were also sacked in the tumult and confusion. At last, the Protonotary surrendered to Virgilio Orsini, who, together with the Count Girolamo, dragged him off to the Pope. As for the Cardinal, "all that he possessed was given up to plunder; his gold and silver, his robes, rich tapestry, and household goods, even to his hat."* As Virgilio Orsini and Girolamo Riario took the Protonotary

* *Infessura*, tom. iii., par. ii. p. 1163.

through the streets, the Count made several attempts to put an end to their prisoner with his arquebuss, but was prevented by Orsini. "Ah! ah! traitor," screamed the Count to his enemy, "when I get you into my hands I will hang you by the neck."

The Pope ordered him to be taken to St. Angelo; and there Girolamo did get him into his hands. The torments to which he was subjected in those secret thick-walled torture chambers, are described as horrible. "At last," writes Infessura,* goaded by his feelings into the unwonted eloquence of irony, "the most holy Father in Christ, our Lord and Master, together with his accomplice, the Count Girolamo, according to their innate and wonted clemency, mercy, and justice, which they have ever shown, and still show, towards the faithful sons of holy Mother Church, have given us a crowning proof of their admirable qualities and hearts. For the medical men summoned by themselves to the prison of the Protonotary Colonna, have declared, that the varied and most excruciating tortures to which he has been subjected, have made it impossible that he should live." He then proceeds to give a detailed account, according to the report of the surgeons, of the injuries inflicted on every part of the unfortunate man's body, which, curious as it is in its indications of the scientific ingenuity of the torturers, is too painful for reproduction.

But though the Colonna was dying, he did not die fast enough. On the 30th of June, therefore, the anniversary, as Infessura remarks, of the decapitation of St. Paul by Nero, "His Holiness, our Lord and Master, inflicted a similar fate on the Protonotary."

* Tom. iii. por. ii. p. 1170.

The mutilated body was then dressed in vile and grotesque rags in mockery of his late rank and state, and so sent to his mother. "And I, Stefano Infessura, the writer of this history, saw it with these eyes, and buried his body with these hands! For no other citizen of the Colonna faction would meddle in the matter, as I suppose, from fear."

It is to be observed therefore that our chronicler was evidently a warm partizan of the persecuted family. But his narrative has all the characteristics of truthfulness as to its facts. Whenever any ill-deed of the opposite faction rests only on common report, or suspicion, he records the accusation, but always marks it as only a report. Besides that he is in the main perfectly corroborated by the apparently impartial Notary of Nantiporto.

After the death of the Protonotary the Colonnas attempted by submission to make peace with Sixtus, so as to preserve some remnant of the family possessions. But Sixtus, though trembling on the verge of the grave himself, would hear of no peace or reconciliation as long as there remained anything belonging to a Colonna, which might be wrenched from them for the enriching of a Riario.

Yet the horizon was daily growing darker around the fortunes and long-cherished hope and aims of the rapidly declining Pontiff. Some months previously to the events just related, he had found himself forced to change suddenly and scandalously his policy with regard to the Venetians. As soon as their success against the Duke of Ferrara seemed imminent, almost all the other states of Italy became seriously alarmed at the prospect of so great an accession of territory and power to the great Republic already so formidable

to its neighbours. They united in urging these views on the Pope, who seems to have become aware about the same time, that if the Venetians conquered, they would conquer for themselves, and that in such case he would have no chance of obtaining the coveted dukedom. He therefore suddenly united himself with the other states in a "santissima lega," against Venice, still intending to direct its forces also against Ferrara, and hoping thus to win the prize he could not bring himself to relinquish.

Rarely has been seen a more striking instance of that strangely interesting but painful spectacle of an unworthy ruling passion strong in death, than that offered by the dying Sixtus. For what had he prostituted to mean aims the awful powers and solemn position intrusted to him? for what wholly disregarded every most dread responsibility; brought scandal, disgrace, and scoffing on his great office; and made the title of Heaven's Vicegerent a blasphemy? for what had he plunged Italy into war, and made Rome a bandit's lair? For a name!—a name that a few years before had been borne from father to son by unknown fishermen, happy in their obscurity! That his "family" might be great among the great ones of the earth!—the family of a mendicant friar and sworn Romish priest!

This was the one passion for which Sixtus IV. lived, and sinned, and died. Yes! died for it. For the misery of failure in his hope was the malady that crushed him into the grave. The game was going all against him. For as all Italy was united in the determination that Venice should not possess Ferrara, and the Republic saw clearly that she could never succeed in taking it in defiance of them all, there was

little obstacle to the peace Italy so much needed. But the Holy Father (!) would hear of no peace. Each courier that brought news from the camp, which indicated the probability of such a solution, inflicted a blow that prostrated him. He was seen by the few who had access to him, plunged in deep melancholy, and totally unable to rally his failing strength.

At length came envoys with the news that peace was made;—made without consent, intervention, or stipulation of his! The messengers with decorously malicious hypocrisy, pretended to think that they were the bearers of acceptable tidings,—enlarged on the blessings thus secured to Italy, which must be so consolatory to the paternal heart of the father of the faithful, and congratulated him on the prospect of durable repose opened to the bleeding country. Every word was a rankling stab to the heart of the despairing but still implacable Pontiff. Willingly would he have clutched with those shaking hands, which he was compelled to raise in hypocritical benediction, the throats of these babblers of peace and reconciliation. But the blow was fatal to the sinking old man. Ferrara and its fair dukedom would never now belong to kith or kin of his. So Sixtus turned his face to the wall and died.*

* 12th of August, 1484.

CHAPTER V.

The Family is founded.—But finds it very difficult to stand on its Foundations.—Life in Rome during an Interregnum.—Magnificent Prince short of Cash.—Our Heroine's Claims to that Title.—A Night Ride to Forlì, and its Results.—An Accident to which splendid Princes are liable.

YET, to a certain extent, Sixtus had done his work and attained the desire of his heart. The "family" *was* founded, though not with all the splendour and all the guarantees for durability which he so ardently wished. The poor Franciscan monk's long studious vigils in his lonely cell, unquenchable ambition, hard upward struggle, patient self-denial in the acquirement of the reputation that was to be his ladder, and audacious spurning of that ladder when the height was won, had obtained the desired reward. The name of Riario was written among those of the princes of Italy. And all those deep theological readings, so well and earnestly pursued as to have made this poor friar the "greatest theologian of the day," "profound casuist," confessor, doctor, general of all Franciscans, and finally, apostolically chosen head of all Christ's Church, never led him to doubt the adequacy of such reward in return for a soul smirched, and moral nature degraded! Well! we must not attempt to weigh in our nineteenth-century atmosphere the deeds done, and still less, the thoughts conceived in the grosser fifteenth-century air, or presume to judge even a pernicious Pope. But for his "theology,"

his science of God I think that there are some materials here for forming a judgment of that.

The "noble" family had got founded. From base-born father and base-born mother, very unexceptionably legitimate and "noble," princes had been born by due application of properly paid sacerdotal rites at proper times and seasons. Strange to think of! And now the business in hand was only to keep what had been gained, to "defend our legitimate position, and the birthright of our children." And that holding our own without an apostolic uncle, may be more difficult than was the making it our own with that assistance.

In truth, the difference between the position of Girolamo and his wife, as long as the breath of life lingered in the nostrils of the terrible old man, and that which it became the instant that breath had departed was tremendous. The fall was a stunning one.

But Catherine was not stunned. Though alone in Rome at that critical moment—for Girolamo was with the troops engaged in driving the Colonnas out of their fastnesses in the neighbourhood of the city—she showed herself, on this her first meeting with difficulty and danger, as promptly energetic and as equal to the emergency as she did on many a subsequent not less trying occasion. Anticipating the more tardy action of the Sacred College, now the only existing authority in Rome, she threw herself into the Castle of St. Angelo, and taking possession of it in the name of her husband, as Commander of the Forces, found there a safe asylum for herself and children, during the first outburst of anarchy that followed the Pontiff's death.

The step was by no means a stronger one than the necessities of the case required. When Girolamo returned to Rome on the 14th, he found his home a

ruin. The state of Rome was like that of a city given up to pillage. The streets were filled with citizens carrying property of all sorts hither and thither, in the endeavour to find some comparatively safe place of stowage for it. Those who had just sacked the houses of others were as much at a loss to preserve their plunder as the more legitimate owners were to save their property. All who were in any wise connected with the Riarii were of course more especially exposed to danger. The large magazines belonging to a certain Giovanni Battista Pallavicini, a brother-in-law of Count Girolamo, which had for several years escaped, by fraudulent connivance, from all visits of the tax-gatherer, were utterly gutted. The mob found in them, we are specially told,* all the wax intended for the obsequies of the Pontiff, a large quantity of alum, and much quicksilver. The Genoese merchants, of whom there were many at Rome, were particularly obnoxious to the mob, as countrymen of the deceased Pope. But little property of value was found in the Count's palace. We have seen it all prudently packed off in time to Forli. But the mob revenged themselves for their disappointment by almost destroying the house itself. Marble doorways and window-cases were wrenched from the walls, and carried off. What could not be removed was destroyed. The green-houses, and even the trees in the gardens, were utterly devastated. One mob rushed out of the city to a farm belonging to the Count in the neighbourhood, and there made booty of a hundred cows, as many goats, and a great number of pigs, asses, geese, and poultry, which belonged, says Infessura, to the Countess.

* Infessura, tom. iii. por. ii. p. 1185.

Other indications of our heroine's good house-keeping were found in enormous stores of salt meat, round Parma cheeses, and very large quantities of Greek wine. The huge granaries, also, from which Sixtus had derived so unrighteous a gain, fell, of course, an easy prey to the plunderers.

By the 22nd of August the Sacred College had succeeded in some degree in restoring Rome to a condition of not more than usual disorder. On that day Girolamo formally undertook to give up into the hands of the Cardinals, the castle and all the fortresses of the Church—but not till they had consented to discharge his little bill of 4000 ducats for arrears of pay as General of the forces.

It would seem, however, as if his active and energetic partner had conceived at the last moment some idea of maintaining her position in St. Angelo contrary to her husband's undertaking—probably until the result of the coming election should be ascertained. For the College was informed, that during the night between the 24th and the 25th, which had been fixed for the handing over of the fortress, a hundred and fifty armed men had been quietly marched into it. The Cardinals were exceedingly indignant at this breach of good faith. It must be concluded, however, that Catherine, strong-hearted as she was, did not find herself sufficiently strong for the contest she clearly seems to have meditated. For Infessura concludes the incident by saying that “the Cardinals, nevertheless, took care that the Countess with all her family, and with the said hundred and fifty men at arms, should evacuate the Castle on the 25th,” as had been stipulated.

Accordingly, on that day, she and Girolamo left Rome, and arrived at Forlì on the 4th of September.

On the 29th, while they were still on their journey, Cardinal Cibo was created Pope by the name of Innocent VIII.

The news of this election was most important and most welcome to the sovereigns of Forlì; for Innocent VIII. had been most materially assisted in his elevation by the two Riario Cardinals, one the cousin and the other the nephew of Girolamo. Infessura lets us into quite enough of the secrets of the Conclave which elected Innocent VIII., to make it clear how grossly simoniacal was their choice—an affair of unblushing bargain and barter altogether. And it may be safely concluded that Girolamo and his fortunes were not forgotten in the agreement for the price of the voices of the Cardinals his kinsmen.

Accordingly, on the fourth day after their arrival at Forlì, arrived three documents, executed in due form: the first recognising and confirming the Count's investiture, with the principalities of Forlì and Imola; the second continuing his appointment as General of the Apostolic forces; and the third dispensing with the residence in Rome which his office in usual course entailed.*

Notwithstanding these great points gained, the position of Girolamo and Catherine was a difficult one, and very different indeed from what it had been at the period of their last arrival in their capital. On this occasion we hear nothing of festal processions and olive branches, of balls, tournaments, or speechifications. The Forlivesi, doubtless, already appreciated by anticipation the great difference, soon to be more vividly brought home to them, between belonging to an enormously wealthy Papal favourite, who had the means of freely spending among them a portion of the immense

* Burriel, p. 121.

revenues derived from sources which in no way wrung *their* withers, and being the subjects of a needy prince, who expected to draw from them the principal part of his income.

Besides, the abortive attempts to increase his possessions, which had formed the leading object of his life for the last eight years, had most materially contributed to increase the difficulties of holding what he *had* acquired under his present changed circumstances. Lorenzo de' Medici, at Florence, whom he had failed to assassinate, Hercules d'Este, at Ferrara, whom he had failed to drive from his dukedom by force, and the Venetians whom Sixtus had suddenly jilted the year before to ally himself with their enemies, and had then excommunicated, were none of them likely to be very cordial or safe neighbours, and were not unlikely to lend a favourable ear, and, under the rose, a helping hand to those persevering Ordelaffi youths, who were always in search of some such means of recovering the heritage of their ancestors.

Thus the four years following the death of Sixtus were little else for Girolamo and Catherine, than a period of continually increasing difficulty and struggle. To the sources of trouble indicated above Girolamo soon added by his imprudence another, which in the sequel led to consequences still more fatal. At the time of the Pope's death he had, as may easily be imagined from some little indications we have had of his theory and practice of administration of the Papal affairs, a very considerable sum of ready money in his hands. But for the last thirteen years of his life his command of resources had been practically almost unlimited; and he was wholly unused to the necessity of abstaining from what he wished on account of con-

siderations of cost. He was a man of magnificent and expensive tastes; and like his apostolic kinsman, had especially that, most fatal to the pocket, of building. At the same time, the extremely distressed state of the people of his principalities at the period of his second arrival among them from Rome, arising from the war and the consequently neglected state of industry and agriculture, made it absolutely necessary to do something for their relief. Girolamo remitted the tax on meat; and at the same time launched out into great and costly building enterprises.

Besides enlarging and beautifying their own residence, and raising the fine vaulting of the cathedral, which still remains to testify to the skill of the builders and the ungrudging orders of their employers, the Count and Countess completed the fortress of Raval-dino * on a greatly increased scale of magnificence and cost. It was now made capable of accommodating 2000 men-at-arms, besides containing magnificent apartments for their own dwelling in case of need, immense storehouses of all sorts, and last, though very far from least in importance, ample prisons. Then, again, there were certain ugly Pazzi and Colonna reminiscences, which made it only common prudence to invest a considerable sum in building a convent or two, considering, as our modern insurance offices remind us, the uncertainty of life. So a Franciscan cloister, and a nunnery of Santa Maria were built "con incredibile spesa," says Burriel. The former tumbled down when just finished, and had to be built a second time. Let us hope, that the catastrophe was not due to any unhandsome attempt at palming off cheap work on "the recording angel."

* Burriel, p. 137.

All these various sources of expenditure in a short time reduced the Count from being a rich man, to the condition of a poor and embarrassed one. This led him to the re-imposition of the taxes he had taken off. And the latter step led to the very unpleasant results indeed, which the sequel of the present chapter has to tell.

In the meantime Catherine presented her husband with three other sons. Her fourth child, and third son, was born on the 30th of October, 1484, and named Giorgio Livio. A fourth was born on the 18th of December, 1485; and a fifth on the 17th of August, 1487. The second of these was christened Galeazzo, after Catherine's father; and it is worth noticing, that one of the child's sponsors at the baptismal font was the envoy sent to the court of Forli by Lorenzo de' Medici. Now, we have abundant evidence that the feelings of Lorenzo were anything but friendly to Girolamo, as indeed it was hardly to be expected that they could have been. And this public friend-like manifestation is an instance of a kind constantly recurring in Italian history, of the mode in which the "*viso sciolto, pensieri stretti*" wisdom was carried into practice, that is far less pleasing to trans-Alpine barbarians than to the Macchiavelli and Guicciardini schooled statesmen of Italy.

From this Galeazzo descend, it may be noted, the present family of the Riarri.

Catherine's sixth child was christened Francesco Sforza, and was generally known by the familiar diminutive Sforzino.

There would be neither instruction nor amusement to be got from reading page after page filled with detailed accounts of the various occasions on which

the chronic state of conspiracy against the Riarii burst out ever and anon into overt acts, during these years. Correspondence was well known to be actively kept up by the Ordellaffi with their friends within the city; and every now and then some butter woman, or friar, or countryman driving a pig into market, was caught with letters in his possession, and had to be hung. Then would occur attempts at insurrection, which occasioned fines and banishment, and beheading and hanging upon a larger scale. And the historians adverse to the Riarii assert that he hung and beheaded too much, and could expect no love from subjects thus treated; while the writers of opposite sympathies maintain, that he hung and beheaded so mildly and moderately, that the Forlivesi were monsters of ingratitude not to love and honour so good a prince.

Thus matters go on, perceptibly getting from bad to worse. Cash runs very low in the princely coffers, and the meat tax has to be re-imposed, occasioning a degree of discontent and disaffection altogether disproportioned to the gratitude obtained by its previous repeal. Unceasing vigilance has to be practised, stimulated by the princely but uncomfortable feeling, that every man approaching is as likely as not to be intent on murdering you. Girolamo and his Countess, one or other, or both, have to rush from Forli to Imola, and from Imola to Forli, at a moment's notice, for the prompt stamping out of some dangerous spark of tumult or insurrection.

In a word, this business of great family-founding on another man's foundations seems to have entailed a sufficiently hard life on those engaged in it. And though that "last infirmity of noble (?) minds," which prompts so much ignoble feeling, and engenders so

many ignoble actions, vexing as it did their prince, vexed also the cultivators of the rich alluvial fields around Forlì by corn taxes, salt taxes, meat taxes, and other "redevances," yet on the whole it may be well supposed that "fallentis semita vitæ" at the plough tail had the best of it, despite occasional danger from the summary justice of the *Castellano* of Ravaldino. That black care, which rode so inseparably and so hard behind the harassed prince backwards and forwards between Forlì and Imola, did more than keep the balance even between hempen jerkin and damasqued coat of mail; and the least enviable man in Forlì and its county was in all probability the founder of the greatness of the Riarii.

One consolation, however, this hard-worked prince had in all his troubles, and that perhaps the greatest that a man can have. His wife was in every way truly a help meet for him. Catherine was the very *belle idéale* of a sovereign châtelaine in that stormy fifteenth century. Her aims and ambitions were those of her husband; and she was ever ready in sunshine or in storm to take her full share of the burden of the day; and, indeed, in time of trouble and danger, far more than what was even then deemed a woman's share in meeting and overcoming them. Dark to all those higher and nobler views of human morals and human conduct which have since been slowly emerging, and are still struggling into recognition, as we must suppose that vigorous intelligence and strong-willed heart to have been, nourished as it was only on such teaching, direct and indirect, as "ages of faith" could supply, still Catherine had that in her, which, if it may fail to conciliate our love, must yet command our respect, even in the nineteenth century. From what

she deemed to be her duty, as far as we can discern, this strong, proud, energetic, courageous, masterful woman never shrank. And it led her on many a trying occasion into by no means rose-strewed paths. Her duty, as she understood it, was by all means of all sorts,—by subtle counsel when craft was needed, by lavished smiles where smiles were current, by fastuous magnificence where magnificence could impose, by energetic action when the crisis required it, by gracious condescension when that might avail, by high-handed right-royal domineering when such was more efficacious, by fearlessly meeting peril and resolutely labouring, to aid and abet her husband in taking and holding a place among the sovereign princes of Italy, and to preserve the same, when she was left to do so single-handed for her children. And this duty Catherine performed with a high heart, a strong hand, and an indomitable will, throwing herself wholly into the turbulent objective life before her, and perfectly unmolested by any subjective examination of the nature of the passions which conveniently enough seemed to range themselves on the side of duty, or doubt-begetting speculations as to the veritable value of the aims before her and the quality of the means needed for the attainment of them.

In March, 1487, Catherine went to visit her relations and connections at Milan, leaving her husband at Imola; but had been there a very few weeks when she was hurriedly summoned to return. Girolamo had been seized with sudden and alarming illness at Imola.* Catherine reached his bedside on the 31st of May, and found him given over by his medical attendants. She

* Burriel, p. 169.

judged, however, that he had not been properly treated, and lost no time in obtaining the best medical advice in Italy, we are told,—from Milan, Ferrara, and Bologna. She also nursed him indefatigably herself, and had the gratification of seeing him slowly recover.

While he was still unable to leave his chamber alarming news arrived from Forlì. The faithful Tolentino had died some time previously, and one Melchior Zocchejo, of Savona, had been appointed *Castellano* of Ravaldino. This man is described* as having been previously a corsair, and as being a most ferocious and brutal man, worthless, moreover, in all respects. The seneschal of the palace at Forlì at this time was a certain Innocenzio Codronchi, an old and faithful adherent of the Riarii. He had made a sort of intimacy with Zocchejo, as a brother chess-player, and used to go into the fortress frequently to play with him, for the duties of the *Castellano* did not permit him ever to leave the fort for an hour. This same impossibility made, it seems, an excuse for the seneschal to offer to send a dinner into the fort, since he could return the governor's hospitality in no other way. Introducing thus several bravoës in the guise of servants, Codronchi suddenly poinarded Zocchejo at table, and with the assistance of his men seized the fort.

It was supposed at once in Forlì, that, old retainer of the family as Codronchi was, he had been gained by the Ordellaffi; and that the fortress, and in all probability the city also, was consequently lost. The consternation was great; and a messenger, despatched in all haste to Imola, reached the sick room of the Count

* Marchesi, Storia di Forlì, lib. ix. p. 554.

late at night with these alarming tidings. He was still too far from well to leave his room. Catherine was expecting her fifth confinement every day. Still the matter was too urgent to be neglected. She at once got into the saddle; and by midnight that night was before the gate of Fort Ravaldino in Forlì, summoning Codronchi to give an account of his conduct.

“Dearest lady,” replied the seneschal,* appearing on the battlements, and speaking thence to his mistress below, “the fortress should not have been entrusted to the hands of such a man as the governor, a worthless drunkard. To-night I can say no more than this. Go, I entreat, and seek repose, and to-morrow return here to breakfast with us in the fort.”

Old servants, it must be supposed, occasionally take strange liberties in all climes and ages; but certainly this address does, under the circumstances of the case, seem one of the strangest.

Catherine, with one attendant before the closed gates of her castle at midnight, had nothing for it but to do as this audacious seneschal advised her. The next morning she went according to invitation, carrying with her, we are told, the materials for an excellent breakfast. But on reaching again the still closely barred gates of Ravaldino, the lady was told from the battlements, that she herself, and the breakfast, with one servant to carry it would be admitted, but no more. If matters looked bad before, this insolent proposition certainly gave them a much worse appearance; and made it very necessary for the Countess to reflect well before acceding to it. If indeed the seneschal had been bought by the Ordelaifi, his conduct was intelli-

* Bernardi, *Lastri Forlivesi*, p. 117.

gible enough, and her fate would be sealed if she trusted herself within the fortress. It might be, however, that Codronchi, alarmed at the daring step he had taken, was only thinking of providing for the immediate safety of his own neck from the first burst of his mistress's wrath, when he refused to admit any followers with her. Again, it might be that he was wavering in his allegiance, and might yet be confirmed in it.

Catherine, after a few minutes of reflection, decided in opposition to the strongly urged advice of her counsellors in the city, on accepting the man's terms; and she and the breakfast and one groom passed into the fortress. All Forlì was, meanwhile, on the tiptoe of anxious expectation for the result. Of what passed at this odd breakfast, we have no means of knowing anything, inasmuch as the citizens of Forlì, including the writers who have chronicled the strange story, remained then and ever after in perfect ignorance on the subject. Catherine, we are told, shortly came forth, and summoning to her one Tommaso Feo, a trusted friend of her own, returned with him into the fortress. And Codronchi immediately gave over the command of it into his hands; which done, he and Catherine, leaving Feo as *Castellano*, came away together to the Palazzo Pubblico of Forlì, where a great crowd of the citizens were waiting to hear the result of these extraordinary events.

The Countess, however, spoke "only a few mysterious words" to the crowd. "Know, my men of Forlì," said she, "that Ravaldino was lost to me and to the city by the means of this Innocenzio here; but I have recovered it; and have left it in right trusty hands." And the seneschal voluntarily confirmed what the lady

said, remarking that it was true enough! Whereupon this self-confessed traitor and the Countess mounted their horses, and rode away to Imola together, apparently in perfect understanding with each other! "And the next morning, two hours after sunrise, Catherine gave birth, without any untoward accident whatever, to a fine healthy boy."*

The whole of which queer story, reading as it does, more like a sort of Puss-in-boots nursery tale than a bit of real matter-of-fact history, gives us a very curious peep at the sort of duties and risks these little sovereigns of a city and its territory had to meet, and the sort of footing on which they often were obliged to stand with their dependants.

This night-ride to Forlì, too, may under all the circumstances of the case be cited in justification of the assertion, that our dashing, vigorous, little scrupulous heroine, had some stuff of fine quality in her after all. And it was on the eve of being yet more severely tried.

Girolamo had recovered and returned with Catherine to Forlì. Being hardly pressed for money, he had farmed out the much-hated meat-tax to one Checco, of the Orsi family, to whom he appears to have owed considerable arrears of pay for military service. Checco d'Orsi wanted, not unreasonably, to stop the arrears due to him out of the sum coming to the Prince from the tax. But this did not suit the Prince's calculations, and he threatened the noble Orsi with imprisonment.

Yet, notwithstanding these sources of ill-feeling, the Count seems to have received him courteously, when on the evening of the 14th of April, 1488, he presented himself at the Prince's usual hour of granting audiences.

* Burriel, p. 174.

It was after supper, and Catherine had retired to "her secret bower," a point of much importance to Checco d'Orsi and his friends. Entering the palace they made sure that the business in hand should not be interrupted by interference of hers, by placing a couple of their number at the foot of the turret stair which led to her private apartments. The others passing on to the great hall,—Sala dei Ninfi,—they found Girolamo leaning with one elbow on the sill of the great window looking on to the Piazza Grande, and talking with his Chancellor.* There was one servant also in the further part of the hall.

"How goes it, Checco mio?" said he, putting out his hand kindly.

"That way goes it!" replied his murderer, stabbing him mortally as he uttered the words.

So Catherine became a widow with six children, at twenty-six years of age.

* Burriel, p. 239; Bonoli, p. 235; Vecchiazani, vol. ii. p. 164; Alberghetti, p. 254; Infessura apud Murat., tom. iii. par. ii. p. 1219.

CHAPTER VI.

Catherine in trouble.—“*Libertà e Chiesa!*” in Forlì.—The Cardinal Savelli.—The Countess and her Castellano perform a comedy before the lieges.—A veteran revolutionist.—No help coming from Rome.—Cardinal Legate in an awkward position.—All over with the Orsi.—Their last night in Forlì.—Catherine herself again.—Retribution.—An octogenarian conspirator’s last day.

THE corpse of the murdered man lay tranquilly on the pavement of that vast “Hall of the Nymphs,” surrounded by the hangings of arras, and sideboards of plate “ten feet high,” the produce of many a deed of rapine, oppression, and wrong; tranquilly and free, for some five minutes past now, from troublous thoughts of meat-taxes, empty coffers, Ordelaifi conspiracies, and revolutions, for the first time these four years! It lay near the great window, and the thick blood flowed slowly over the painted brick floor, making a dark stain, which Forlì tradition could still point out to curious strangers towards the end of the last century. The affrighted servant, who it seems was one Ludovico Ercolani, a butler, long in the service of the Riarri, had run from the hall, to carry the terrible tidings to the distant chamber of the Countess. And for a few short minutes the murderers, Checco d’Orsi and his accomplices, Giacomo Ronchi and Ludovico Pansecco, stood alone over their victim, with pallid faces and

starting eyeballs, taking rapid counsel as to what was next to be done.*

This ruffian Pansecco, one of the historians quietly remarks, had been employed by the Count on occasion of the Pazzi murders.

Those moments were anxious ones to the doers of the desperate deed, for all depended on the feeling, with which the populace might at the first blush regard it. Their anxiety was not of long duration, however. From the open window the three assassins cried to the people in the Piazza "Liberty! Liberty! The tyrant is dead! Forlì is its own mistress!" It was the evening hour at which every Italian, then as now, is out of doors enjoying the fresh air, and chatting with neighbours, sitting in groups in front of the druggists' shops—(a curiously universal and time-honoured habit in the provincial cities of Italy), or walking to and fro in the principal square; and the news, therefore, ran through the city with the quickness of lightning. In an instant the Piazza was crowded with citizens, crying, "An Orso! an Orso! Liberty! Liberty!" and the conspirators were safe—for the present.

The palace guard lost no time in providing for their own safety, by separating and mingling with the people. Ludovico d'Orsi, Checco's brother, a doctor of law and whilome senator at Rome, who had been guarding the stair leading to Catherine's apartments, went out into the Piazza to excite and direct the mob. But the Chancellor, who had been with the Count at the time of

* For the account of the following interesting passages of Catherine's life, the authorities are Burriel, lib. ii. cap. v. vi. vii. ; Alberghetti, p. 255, *et seq.*; Vecchiazzani, vol. ii. p. 164, *et seq.*; and Bonoli, lib. x. The last is on this occasion the best, and has been chiefly followed in the text.

the murder, had meanwhile reached Catherine's room by another passage. Her younger children and their nurses, and a young sister of hers, named Stella, whom she was about to marry advantageously to a certain Andrea Ricci, were with her. And the confusion in that room, full of women and children, on the abrupt and breathless telling of such news may be easily imagined. But Catherine, with infinite promptitude of thought, ordered Ludovico to hasten, without losing a moment by lingering with them, to the castle; and to tell Feo, the governor, from her, to send off instant couriers to her brother, the Duke, at Milan, and to her husband's friend and ally, Bentivoglio, Lord of Bologna.

Catherine, and the women with her, barred the door behind him as best they might with heavy furniture and so forth. But he had hardly had time to get clear of the palace before Checco with half-a-dozen ruffians were thundering at the Countess's room, and in a very few minutes had forced an entrance. The chroniclers have noted that Orsi could not bring himself at that moment to face Catherine. He remained at the door, while the men he had brought with him made the women understand that they must come with them.

And thus the family of the murdered sovereign were marched through the crowded streets of the city to the Orsi palace, and there locked up as prisoners.

That done, the conspirators hastily called together the leading men in the city, to decide on the steps to be taken for the government of it henceforth. For the Orsi, wealthy, numerous, influential, and violent as they were, had no hope of being permitted to make themselves lords of Forlì. They proposed, therefore,

the step which promised the next best chances for their own greatness and power,—to lay Forlì at the feet of the Pontiff. This was frequently a measure adopted in those days in similar circumstances. The crime committed would be thus wiped out; the family of the murdered prince, and the neighbouring princes, who might be disposed to profit by the occasion, would be kept at bay; and, since the Church could only hold and govern and tax distant dependencies by means of governors and lieutenants, who so likely to step into such profitable places, as the powerful citizen who had gained the new state for the Holy Father?

The frightened council at once assented to the proposal, and sent off that same night messengers to the Cardinal Savelli, who was residing as governor for the Church at Cesena, a city about twelve miles to the south of Forlì.

Meanwhile some of the partisans of the Orsi had thrown the body of Girolamo from the window into the Piazza; and while the citizens were busied in displaying everywhere the papal flag, amid cries of “Chiesà! Chiesà!” the mob having torn every rag of clothing from the corpse, dragged it through the streets of the city, till certain friars took it from them, and placed it in the sacristy of their church.

The Cardinal Savelli did not at all like the proposal made to him; and lost some important time, before, “being unwilling to have it said that the Church had lost a chance through his cowardice,” he at last made up his mind to accept it. On arriving at Forlì, his first step was to visit Catherine in the Orsi Palace. An historical novelist would have little difficulty, and better historical warranty than often suffices for such purposes, in presenting his readers with a sufficiently

striking and picturesque account of that interview. Catherine, the historians tell us, was, as we might expect from our knowledge of her, haughty, unbroken, and unbending; the Cardinal, as we might also expect from our knowledge of his kind, smooth-tongued, courteous, full of regrets and talk about his sacred duty to Holy Mother Church. This is all history tells us. But it is enough. The imagination has no difficulty in filling up the sketch.

But at the conclusion of his courteous talking, the Cardinal intimated, that it would be better, that the Countess and her family should for the present find a safe shelter in a small but strong building over the St. Peter's gateway, under the care of trusty citizens, to be named by his Eminence. And Catherine was far from unwilling to acquiesce in the change. For though the accommodation proposed to her was materially of the most wretched, yet she naturally preferred any prison to the home of her husband's murderer; and the Cardinal's hint, that the gateway prison might be a safer asylum for her and her children than the palace of the Orsi, was, she felt, more than a mere pretext.

That night, accordingly, the 15th of April, Catherine and her family were marched through the city, escorted by a troop of guards, bearing torches, from the Orsi palace to her new prison. The little procession of prisoners consisted of twelve persons; the Countess herself, her mother (who is now mentioned for the first time since her daughter's birth, and who may in all probability be supposed to have become Catherine's inmate at the time of her settling permanently in Forlì after the death of Sixtus), her sister Stella, her six children, a natural son of the Count, named Scipio,

and two nurses. They were received with all courtesy by the three citizens to whose keeping the Cardinal had consigned them; but suffered much from the insufficiency of the small room to hold them.

The next day Cardinal Savelli and the conspirators summoned Feo, the Governor of Ravaldino, to deliver up the fortress; and on his refusal, they brought Catherine from her prison to the foot of the walls, and there compelled her to give her own orders *viva voce* to the *Castellano* to do so. On his showing himself on the ramparts, she not only commanded, but implored him with every possible appearance of earnestness, to save her life by delivering up the fort. In all probability the Countess and her *Castellano* perfectly understood each other. In any case he knew Catherine's character, and had, moreover, the orders which had reached him by Ercolani for his guidance. At all events, he replied to her commands and entreaties by a steady refusal; and the baffled conspirators had to take her back to the gate-house.

"Ah, Madame Catherine," said Giacomo Ronchi, one of three who had murdered the Count, and who stood by her side as she parleyed with Feo, "if you were really in earnest, he would yield. But it is you, who do not wish him to obey your words; and it makes me long to lay you dead where you stand with a thrust of this partizan through the body!"

This, writes Cobelli, the ballet-master historian, I heard, who was there, listening and seeing everything in order to record it faithfully.

That night the faithful Ercolani contrived to gain admittance to his mistress in her prison; and it was then concerted, that if, as she anticipated, she were again taken to the fort on the morrow, to repeat the

scheme which had that day failed, she should attempt to obtain permission to enter the fortress. To this end, Ercolani was to communicate with Feo with the utmost secrecy, and give him the necessary instructions for playing into Catherine's hands. He was to seek an interview with the Cardinal also, and endeavour to persuade him by feigning anxiety on account of the danger to Catherine from the governor's obstinacy, that the surest means of inducing him to yield would be to allow her to speak to him within the castle. He knew both parties well enough, he assured his Eminence, to feel certain, that Feo would not be able to resist his mistress, when brought face to face with her.

The Cardinal had lately had that honour, and was inclined to think the statement probable enough.

The following day, Catherine, as she had expected, was again taken to the foot of the ramparts of the fortress by the conspirators, accompanied this time by Savelli; and the *Castellano* was again called to parley.

The comedy of yesterday having been again performed between them, the Cardinal demanded of the governor, whether he would obey his lady, if she were to enter the fortress, and there give him the same orders, so that he could have no pretext for supposing that she was acting under constraint. To this Feo replied, that he could not say what he might do under such circumstances, but should endeavour to act up to what should then seem to be his duty. On her part, Catherine declared, that she was sure she could induce him to yield, if only she could be permitted to speak to him privately.

The Orsi and their friends were strongly against letting her out of their hands, although she reminded

them that she left her children as hostages in their power. Cardinal Savelli, however, was for allowing her to go in, and his counsel prevailed.

Catherine was permitted to enter the fortress alone, on the agreed understanding, that, successful or not in prevailing upon the governor, she was to come forth again in three hours.

Very exciting was the interest which kept all parties in the city on the tip-toe of expectation during these important three hours. Both among the well-wishers of the Countess, and among her enemies, opposite opinions prevailed as to the probabilities of the issue. Money to a great extent would have changed hands on the event, had the scene been enacted among our bet-loving countrymen. The Forlivesi passed the time in ceaseless debate as to the course which the lady might, could, would, or should adopt. The space before the ramparts of the castle remained crowded with anxious groups of talking citizens during the whole of the appointed interval. And the Orsi, and their more immediate allies, consoled their shrewd misgivings, that their victim had escaped them, by dark threats as to the fate of her children.

At length, the great bell on the Piazza told all Forlì that the three hours were over. All rushed towards the castle to witness the variously expected event. The sitting groups sprang to their feet; and a sudden silence succeeded to the roar of a whole city's chatter, when, in obedience to a summons from a trumpet, Feo appeared on the battlements. And it is easy to imagine the burst of varied passions, which again broke forth into a storm of voices, when that officer, with most untroubled coolness, told them, that:—

“His liege lady was much fatigued by what she

had gone through ; that immediately on her entry into the fort, he had counselled her to seek repose ; and that she was now, in fact, enjoying a sound sleep, from which he could not think of disturbing her. That, as to her quitting the fortress of Ravaldino in the present state of her city of Forlì, he, governor of that fortress, judged it safer for her not to do so ; and, therefore, be her own intentions what they might, when she should awake from her slumbers, he should in no wise permit her to go forth.”

And so saying, the *Castellano*, calm, in the secure consciousness of the perfect strength of his walls, retreated into their shelter.

His Eminence the Cardinal Savelli was angry enough at the dupery which had been practised on him. But the Orsi, to whom the matter in hand was a question of life, station, and property, were transported with fury. Some of them hastened off to the gatehouse prison, and soon returned with Catherine's children. The imperturbable *Castellano* was again summoned to his ramparts, and ordered to inform the Countess* that the lives of her children depended on the instant performance of her compact.

Again he replied, that he would do nothing of the kind. As to the children, who were there below in the hands of their father's assassins, in mortal terror enough, poor things, and naturally urging the governor with very earnest and sincere entreaties to give up the fort and save their lives, he would merely advise the citizens of Forlì to reflect a little before they suffered a hair of their heads to be hurt. He reminded them, that these children were the nephews of the

* Note 11.

powerful and neighbouring Duke of Milan, that the Lord of Bologna, still nearer at hand, was their ally and connection; and told them to ask of themselves whether, in the case of their cold-blooded murder, it was not likely that the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah might be tolerable compared with that, which would fall on Forlì.

The Cardinal Savelli, angry and provoked as he was, had certainly no intention of really staining his hands with these children's blood. The body of the citizens felt the truth of what Feo had said; and eventually the boys and their sister were carried back to their prison unhurt, though the Orsi and their accomplices were, says Burriel, gnashing their teeth with baffled fury.

On the evening of that day, the 16th, while the Orsi and their friends were at supper, and engaged in anxious discussion as to the next steps to be taken, their father, who had retired from the city to his country house a little before the murder of the Count, returned to the Orsi palace. He was eighty-five years old, and in revolutionary matters certainly might well be deemed a high authority, for this was the seventh insurrection in which he had been engaged in Forlì. In all the troubles, which had preceded the expulsion of the Ordelfaffi, as well as in all those which had succeeded the usurpation of the Riarii, this turbulent old noble had always taken a leading part. Now, drawing various examples from the treasures of his long experience, the old man severely blamed his sons for leaving their work half done. Either they ought to have never ventured on such a step as putting the Count to death, or they ought to have extinguished his entire family. As it was, he augured ill of the future, and feared that the having let Catherine escape into a

fortress perfectly impregnable by any means at their command, would prove an irremediable and fatal error.

It was determined among them to send off messengers to Rome that night, to lay the obedience of the city at the feet of the Pontiff, and urge him to send immediate assistance in troops and munitions.

The 17th was occupied in hostilities, which caused much mischief and suffering in the city, without the least advancing any solution of the position. The Cardinal Legate brought up from Cesena all the troops he could collect under the pontifical banner; but they had no efficient means of attacking Ravaldino. On the other hand, Feo bombarded the town, and left marks still pointed out centuries afterwards; and caused many catastrophes, the subject of Forlì traditional talk for many a year. But still nothing decisive was accomplished.

On the 18th, a herald from Bentivoglio, Prince of Bologna, arrived in Forlì, and was received by Savelli and the heads of the revolutionary party in the town hall. He came, he said, in the first place, to warn the citizens on the part of his master, on pain of certain and entire destruction of their city, to do no harm to the children of the murdered Count; and secondly, to demand that Catherine should be placed in liberty, and Octavian, the eldest son of Girolamo, proclaimed Count of Forlì.

To these demands Savelli replied, that for the children there was nothing to be feared: they were in perfect safety. As to the Countess, she was in perfect liberty as far as the city authorities were concerned; and all that was asked of her was to give up the citadel and depart in peace. But as for proclaiming the late Count's heir, sovereign of Forlì, that was

wholly out of the question, even if the city wished to do so; inasmuch as they had already declared themselves the Pope's subjects, and had sent an embassy to Rome to lay their city and their fealty at the feet of his Holiness. With which answer the herald retired.

But the mere appearance of this messenger from the Lord of Bologna had produced an effect upon several of the citizens, which must have warned the conspirators how little they could depend upon the steadiness or support of the people. Many began to murmur against those who, they already surmised, might be ultimately on the losing side; and Savelli and the Orsi had to send many suspected of adhering to the Riarri out of the city.

Catherine's sister Stella was taken from the Gatehouse prison to the bedside of her betrothed husband Ricci, who was laid up by wounds he had received in the fighting that had occurred in the palace immediately after the murder; and having been there married to him, was permitted to depart to Cesena in company with her mother Lucretia.

During this day, too, the Orsi, becoming more and more painfully anxious about the issue of their enterprise, sent a letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, asking his support against the family of his old enemy. But on the 19th, the messenger came back, bringing only a verbal answer from Lorenzo, to the effect that he had no surviving resentment on account of by-gone matters to gratify—that he had no inclination to meddle in such an affair as that proposed to him; and that he hoped and purposed to pass the remainder of his days in quiet.

On the 20th, arrived two letters from the Duke of Milan, one to Savelli, and one to the Comunità of

Forlì. In the first the Duke expressed his astonishment that the Cardinal should have ventured to take possession of Forlì, not merely without any commission from his Holiness, but, as there was every reason to believe, before any knowledge of the recent events had reached the Papal court. He admonished his Eminence, that he was acting in open disregard of all law and every principle of justice; and concluded by very pointedly advising him, as he would avoid further misfortunes, to return forthwith to his own affairs at Cesena. The letter to the Comunità in much the same terms advised the citizens, as the only means of confining the consequences of the late excesses to the immediate authors of them, to send away the Cardinal, and return at once to their allegiance.

Savelli began to find himself in a difficult and disagreeable position, and resolved on taking a strong, and what would appear to our ideas a dangerous step. Since nothing came from Rome, neither troops, nor authority of any kind for what he had done in the Pope's name, his Eminence determined to forge the letter so urgently needed. He accordingly produced a bull, which he declared had just reached him from Rome, by which his Holiness thanked the Forlivesi for their affection towards the Church, accepted the allegiance of the city, and promised to send troops with speed to support them in the course they had taken. The fraud was, however, but partially successful for the moment; for many, we are told, doubted of the authenticity of this bull from the first.

The next day things looked still worse for the conspirators and their ecclesiastical patron. Two heralds from Bentivoglio, and the Duke of Milan, rode into the great square of Forlì, and publicly before the people

demanded, in the name of the Duke of Milan, that the children of the late Count should be immediately brought to him; announcing further, that a strong force was then on its march, and already within a short distance of the city. Checco d'Orsi, who received them, replied with the utmost insolence and audacity, that the children had already been put to death, and that Forlì feared neither Bentivoglio nor the Duke of Milan, as the Pope's troops would be there to help them before the Milanese could reach the city. How much of this was mere bravado, and how much inspired by real hope of succour from Rome, it is difficult to say. But it became clear afterwards, that Innocent VIII., who was a very different man from the aggressive Franciscan his predecessor, had turned a completely deaf ear to the proposals of the Forlivesi, and the communications of his own legate; being determined, as it should seem, in no wise to interfere in the matter. Indeed, when the over-zealous legate Savelli was afterwards within an inch of being hung by Catherine for his share in the revolution, Innocent abstained from all interference even by remonstrance in his favour.

Thus matters went on till the 29th, the Milanese and Bolognese troops gradually drawing near to the city, and Savelli and the Orsi becoming daily more discouraged and alarmed at the non-appearance of the expected assistance from the Pope. Once the sentine on the top of the tower of the Palazzo Pubblico declared, that he saw troops coming towards the city from the southward; and the news in an instant put the declining cause of the conspirators once again in the ascendant with the fickle populace. The whole city was ringing with cries of "Orso! Orso! Chiesà! Chiesà!" when it was discovered that the supposed

Papal army was a body of fifty horsemen coming to the assistance of the Countess; and the affections of the Forlì lieges again began to lean towards their old masters accordingly.

Meantime Savelli battered the citadel with cannon brought from Cesena and Forlimpopoli, and Feo battered the city from his rampart, but without much mischief being done on either side.

On the 29th, the army of the Duke of Milan and the Bolognese were before the walls of Forlì. A duly accredited envoy from the Duke entered the town, and had a long secret interview with Savelli. Communications passed also between Catherine in the fortress and her friends outside the city. The fort of Ravaldino seems during the whole time of the rebellion to have had free means of communication, for ingress and egress, with the open country beyond the walls of the city; so that Catherine might at any time have escaped had she not preferred to hold the citadel. The preservation of her dominions, and very possibly her life, were entirely due to the possession of this stronghold. And the incidents of this rebellion in Forlì, which may be taken as a very perfect type of hundreds of similar events of constant recurrence in the history of the petty principalities and municipalities of Italy in those centuries, throw a very sufficient light on the paramount importance attached by the rulers of those cities to the possession of such a place of refuge, and the proportionably vast sums they expended in erecting and maintaining them. The great difficulty in the matter always was to find some *Castellano* sufficiently trustworthy for it to be safe to confide the fortress to his keeping. The great power arising from the absolute command of a building so strong as to be impregnable

to any means of attack that citizens could bring against it, and from which the inmates might do much damage to the city with very little danger of suffering any injury themselves, was so great and so tempting, that the governors of these fortresses were rarely to be depended on. It might be almost said, that in cases of difficulty and temptation treachery was the rule, and fidelity to the lord the exception. And it not unfrequently occurred, that the *Castellano* within his walls felt himself to be more than a match for his master and sovereign outside them: a state of things of which some of the episodes in the history of Forlì narrated in these pages have shown us a few symptoms.

By the evening of the 29th, it was sufficiently evident that it was all up with the hopes of the insurgents in Forlì. The game was clearly played out and lost. To make their situation still more desperate, a great number of written papers signed by Catherine were found scattered about the great square and streets of the town soon after dusk that evening. These contained strong exhortations from the Countess to her faithful subjects of Forlì, to put summarily to death all the leaders of the conspiracy before they could escape from the city; and promises of favour and rewards to any man whose dagger should be the means of making an end of any one of them.

The Orsi and their associates felt that the city was rapidly becoming too hot to hold them. That night, in hurried council, they determined on leaving Forlì secretly, before morning.

But there was one thing,—and the incident is strikingly illustrative of the character of the country and the epoch, and of the undying ferocity of Italian party hatred,—one thing to be done, even before providing

for their personal safety, fearfully endangered as it was by every hour of delay. They determined that Catherine, on coming forth triumphant from her fortress, should find herself childless; and feel, in the moment of consummating her success, that it was worthless to her.

The six children were still at the gate-house in the care of the three citizens to whom Savelli had entrusted them. In the early part of the night, therefore, Checco d'Orso, Ronchi, and Pansecchi presented themselves at the prison, with a fictitious order from Savelli that the children should be given up to them to be conducted to a place of safety out of the city. Fortunately for the little ones, Capoferri conceived suspicions of the truth of the representations made to him, and steadily refused to give up the children, despite the urgent persuasions and threats of Orsi. The cautious triumvirate of the gate-house had declined to admit within their walls more than him alone of the party at the door. Checco, therefore, on finding himself thus baffled, made a sign from a window to his comrades outside to force an entrance at the moment of his passing out. Ronchi, seizing an axe, approached the door for this purpose. But a sentinel on the wall above, observing this hostile movement, fired down upon him and a servant, who was with him, and killed the latter. Ronchi retired from the wall, and at the same moment Orsi came out, and the gate was safely shut behind him.

There remained nothing for the baulked desperadoes but to hurry, with rage and despair in their hearts, to join the small body of relatives and adherents, who had prepared to quit the city with them. They went out, a party of seventeen, at two o'clock in the morn-

ing of the 30th of April : and thus the revolution was at an end.

According to all medieval law, right, and custom, Forlì deserved to be sacked in punishment for its rebellion ; and it was not altogether easy for Catherine to save it from the horrors of such a fate. For it might be difficult to get rid of the troops who had come to her aid, if they were baulked of their anticipated prey. The Countess announced to the citizens that if she spared them this merited chastisement, she did so solely for the sake of the women of Forlì ; for the men had not deserved mercy from her : and eventually, by prudence and caution, and permitting only a very few of the soldiers to enter the walls, Forlì was saved from sack.

One of the historians somewhat maliciously observes, that though he has no doubt of Madama Caterina's merciful consideration for the women of Forlì, still it was a fact, that all the vast quantity of plunder taken from the palace after the murder of the Count, was scattered through the city, and was subsequently nearly all recovered by the Countess ; whereas, if Forlì had been sacked, no fragment of all this wealth would ever have been seen again.

And now, once again, we have pomps and processions, and complimentary speeches, and smiles, and oaths of fealty, and gracious condescension. The magistrates go in procession to Catherine in the fortress, with the key of the city, and excuses, and compliments, and loud detestation of the recent crime. And Catherine, on horseback between the generals of the forces sent to support her, makes a triumphant entry into the city ; and there is an affecting meeting, with embracings and tears, between the Countess and

her children; and Ottaviano is proclaimed Count, and "Madama," his mother, named regent; poor Girolamo is buried with much pomp in Imola; every tongue has something now to tell in favour of the lady regent:—did she not, when, surrounded by the Milanese and Bolognese officers, she was taking formal re-possession in great state of a fort outside the city, and when a man-at-arms rushed up to her in the middle of the ceremony, to say with panting breath, "Madonna! all the cellars of the Orsi are being plundered by the people! but I have secured some of the largest butts of wine for your ladyship, and have set a guard over them!"—did she not then and there, in the midst of the stranger generals, graciously reply, that she preferred that the poor people should share the wine among them, for that neither she nor her children wished to possess anything that had belonged to the Orsi! . . . and, in a word, all is sunshine once again, . . . except in one small cell of the Palazzo Pubblico, where a few of those who have made themselves noted by their violence during the insurrection, and have failed to escape in time from the city, are reserved for vengeance.

It is but just to Catherine's fair fame to note, that they were very few; and further to remember, if their punishment excites our loathing, that mercy was hardly recognised as a virtue, or known as a sentiment in those "ages of faith." There were among them the man who had thrown the Count's body from the window, and he who had been chiefly prominent in dragging it through the city. There was also the veteran revolutionist, Orsi, with his eighty-five years, long-flowing silver locks, and noble patrician bearing. The unfortunate old man had been left behind, when

his sons and the others of the family had left the city, probably because his great age made it impossible for him to join in their hurried flight.

On the 1st of May three of these prisoners were hung at the windows of the Palazzo Pubblico, and then thrown thence into the square, where they were literally torn to pieces, and the shocking fragments left exposed till sunset, when they were collected and buried. The brutalising effects of such spectacles on the entire mass of the population is sufficiently indicated by the fact, that contemporary public opinion considered the Countess to have used much and unusual moderation in her dealings with such of the conspirators as fell into her hands.

On the evening of that day an ominous decree was posted in all quarters of the city, requiring that one able-bodied man from every family in Forlì should attend on the morrow with pickaxe and crowbar in front of the vast and magnificent palace of the Orsi. At daybreak on the 2nd of May a great crowd, armed as had been ordered, were assembled. At the same hour the venerable-looking head of the great Orsi clan was seen coming forth from his prison on the piazza, bare-headed, with his long silver locks glancing in the sunshine of that bright May morning, with hands bound behind his back, and led by the hangman, holding the end of a halter passed round the old man's neck. Thus led into the midst of the crowd of his fellow-citizens, he was placed in front of his ancestral home. And then the work of demolition was commenced.

“Have you well marked the spectacle, O Orso!” said the hangman to his prisoner, when the work was done; and then led him by the halter back to the piazza.

A cruel death awaited him there ; but that which he had already endured, was probably the bitterest part of his punishment to the old patrician. That razing of the family mansion was infinitely more to a mediæval Italian noble, than the mere destruction of so much property ; and carried with it a bitterness of misery hardly appreciable to our less clannish feelings, and less localised attachments. The old Italian noble would have seen an equal amount of property destroyed at his villa in the country, or at a residence in a foreign city, had he possessed such, with comparative indifference. But the turreted family "palazzo" in his native city, his fortress in time of civil broil, the patriarchal home of several branches and generations of his race, the manifestation and evidence of the rank and importance of his clan, was more in his eyes than mere stone and timber. His strongest passion, his family pride, saw in the old ancestral walls the corporeal presentment of the family name. And the levelling of the massive building with the soil, was the extremest ignominy an enemy could inflict, and was felt by the doomed race as a symbol of the extinction of their name and stock for ever.

These were the feelings in that old man's heart, when the hangman asked if he had well observed the spectacle before him, as he led him away to the one other scene that remained for him. In the piazza it was the nerves of the old man's *body* that were to be tortured.

A powerful horse was there ready prepared with a stout plank attached to its tail. To this plank the Orso was bound in such a manner that the feet were nearest to the horse, and the head passing beyond the length of the board, fell back upon the stones. In

this manner he was dragged twice round the piazza ; and then, though by that time nearly, if not quite dead, his side was opened, the heart torn from the quivering carcase, and rent to pieces before the people.

But it is probable, that all unpleasant traces of these things were properly wiped away and removed, the next morning, when the Countess, in procession, passed over those same flagstones, on her way to the cathedral to "celebrate Te Deum," and do other appropriate "Divine Service."

CHAPTER VII.

An unprotected Princess.—Match-making, and its penalties.—A ladies man for a Castellano.—A woman's weakness.—And a woman's political economy.—Wanted, by the city of Forli, a Jew; any Israelite, possessing sufficient capital, will find this, &c. &c.—The new Pope, Alexander VI.—The value of a Jubilee.—Troublous times in Forli.—Alliances made, and broken.—Catherine once more a widow.

OUR Catherine now found herself in exactly that position, which in her age and country had led to so many historical tragedies, and brought about the ruin of so many similarly situated princesses, and the misery of the hapless people subjected to them. A beautiful widow of six-and-twenty, holding one rich principality in her own right, and a second still more valuable, as regent for a son only nine years of age, was infallibly a mark for all the princely fortune-hunters, and ambitious intriguers throughout Italy. Every degree and mode of interference from marriage to murder was likely to be brought to bear by greedy nobles and unprincipled brother sovereigns against one of the weaker sex so circumstanced. But Catherine hardly deserves to be described by such a phrase. If her sex marked her place among the feebler portion of mankind, the virility of her character claimed a high standing for her among the strongest of the masters of creation. And she felt, and showed herself perfectly capable of standing alone, and holding her own and her son's inheritance by her sole unaided prudence and energy.

In the early days of her widowhood a report arose that a marriage* was in contemplation between the Countess of Forlì and Antonio Ordelaffi, pretender to that principality. His brother, Francesco, was dead, and he was now the sole representative of the old dynasty, which had ruled Forlì for so many centuries. The report of the probability of such a marriage arose, doubtless, from the manifest advantages derivable from such an arrangement. It has been seen how sure a thorn in the sides of the Riarii was the existence of this exiled but unforgotten family ; how insecure and uneasy it rendered their hold of the principality, and how the never-ceasing intrigues and incitements of the pretenders continually kept party jealousies and hatred alive, and ever and anon burst into insurrectionary attempts, necessitating constant vigilance and severe punishments, themselves the cause of further disaffection.

All this unhappy state of things might be remedied, the unfortunate heir of a long line of princes restored to his inheritance, and a beautiful young widow very satisfactorily mated with a noble and not undistinguished cavalier (for such Antonio Ordelaffi had become as a *Condottiere* in the service of Venice), and everything made pleasant to all parties by this match. So thought the gossips, patrician and plebeian, in the cities of Romagna ; and, accordingly, settled the matter to their own satisfaction, as gossips are wont to do in similar cases.

So much appearance of authenticity had the report assumed, and so completely had the good folk of Forlì taken for granted the truth of it, that in order not to

* Burriel, p. 430 ; Bonoli, vol. ii. p. 260.

be found behind-hand in their preparations for the festivities to ensue, when the great event should be announced, many families had prepared liveries and streamers, with the united colours of the Ordelaffi and Riarii, and staves in great numbers, similarly painted, for carrying in processions. And it was the chance discovery of some of these well-intended preparations, that first revealed to the Countess the plans which her lieges of Forlì had taken on themselves to make in her behalf.

Catherine was furious! Who had dared to speak, or to believe when spoken, so gratuitous and detestable a calumny? What had the world, and especially her own subjects, ever seen in her conduct to make them think it possible that she should sacrifice the prospects of her son to any considerations of her own tranquillity? What! she a Sforza, unite herself to an Ordelaffi, and for fear of him! She need to seek a protector, and find him in the vagabond heir of a house, whose weakness and misconduct had deservedly lost them their dominion! She would show them that her own hand was strong enough to hold the rein, ay, and the whip as well, in her City of Forlì. And now, what fool had been guilty of the insolent absurdity of painting these sticks with colours so offensively chosen?

Whereupon, cringes into the presence-chamber of the angry dame, shaking in his shoes, and with many a profound obeisance, an old acquaintance of our own—no other than gossiping Messer Leon Cobelli, musician, painter, ballet master, and historian! He, in his capacity of painter, while dreaming of festivals to be arranged, enjoyed, and afterwards chronicled by himself, had mingled those tints in so detestable mesalliance.

Off to the gate-house prison with him, there to meditate on the difference between scribbling his history, when his lords had enacted it, and presuming to arrange it for them beforehand.

So poor Cobelli is forthwith marched off in high dudgeon, and had awful thoughts,* in his anger, of condemning his liege lady to sudden and irreparable forfeiture of an immortality of glory by burning his chronicle of her deeds ; but the reflection, that in that case he, Leon Cobelli, ballet-master to the court, would himself share in the condemnation, happily arrested his hand before the sacrifice was consummated.

So thoroughly did the high and haughty dame impress on the frightened Forlivesi the expediency of holding their tongues and not opening too wide their eyes in respect to matters of such delicate nature, and so much above them, that when, not long afterwards, there really was somewhat of the sort to talk about, such a discreet silence was observed, as almost to have defeated the detective investigations of Mnemosyne herself.

Tommaso Feo was, as has been seen, governor of the citadel of Forlì for Catherine, having been placed there by herself on a very critical occasion. It has been seen, also, how well and zealously he acquitted himself of his trust in the difficult circumstances following upon the assassination of the Count. He came from Savona, Girolamo's birthplace, and had been for many years a faithful follower of the fortunes of the Riarii. Now, this Tommaso Feo had a brother, Giacomo, not yet twenty years old, a remarkably handsome youth, "very tall, excellently well-made, of a

* Burriel, p. 431.

beautiful pink complexion, courteous and pleasant with all, both high and low, and well skilled in all manly and knightly exercises." * This well-favoured youth had been looked on with a very approving eye by the high and puissant dame, his sovereign lady. And the circumstance of her having, a short time previously, given a lady, who was a relative of her own, in marriage to Tommaso Feo, his brother, made it seem natural that both the young men should be admitted more freely into the society of the Countess than might otherwise have been expected.

Before long, however, the young and beautiful widow determined on taking a step, which,—as is frequently the case with the steps taken by young and beautiful widows,—caused no little raising of the eyebrows, and some very cautiously whispered talk among the citizens of Forlì. This was nothing less startling than the substitution of the young and handsome bachelor brother, for the tried and trusty elder brother, in the high and important post of *Castellano* of Ravaldino.

But high-handed and strong as Catherine was, we have already seen enough of the ways of these governors of strong fortresses in general, and of stout Tommaso Feo in particular, to make it very intelligible that the lady did not see fit to proceed to her intent by simply ordering Tommaso to walk out, and Giacomo to walk in to Ravaldino. A good *Castellano's* duty was to hold his castle, as a good terrier's duty is to hold the throat of the creature he has been bidden to attack; and it often happens that the master of the staunch beast cannot induce him to relinquish his gripe. The question was, before a word had transpired of the

* Burriel, p. 450.

proposed change, how to get staunch Tommaso out of his place of strength.

With this view, the crafty lady gave a fête in her gardens outside the city, to which the Governor was courteously invited. In this little excursion outside the walls, there was little to excite the *Castellano's* suspicions. He could leave the communication between the fortress and the city safely closed behind him, come out from the citadel into the open country, and return to it at pleasure by the same road. But what is man's wit worth against a woman's wiles! In the gardens, no arm would serve Catherine to lean on save that of her trusty *Castellano*. They spent a charming day; "tasted together various fruits;" and when his beautiful sovereign declared herself at the end of the day's pleasure so tired that he must give her his arm as far as the palace, what mortal *Castellano* could do otherwise than fall into the trap so cleverly baited.

If such there were, good Tommaso Feo was not the man. Pleased and flattered, he led the fair traitress through the little city to her palace, and was no sooner within its walls than he was tapped on his shoulder, and bade to deliver up his sword, and consider himself a prisoner! This having been satisfactorily done, Madama,—as the chroniclers from the period of her first husband's death almost invariably call her,—summoned the conscious Giacomo to her presence, and stated, that though nothing had occurred to diminish her high esteem for his brother, circumstances made it desirable that she should change her *Castellano*—that Tommaso would for the present return to his native Savona, quitting the city with a guard of honour as a mark of her high consideration; and that she wished him to accept the vacated post.

Giacomo, we are told, accepted his preferment with well-acted modesty and surprise, and Tommaso appears to have become easily reconciled to the arrangement, as he is not long after found back again in Forlì, in the service of the Countess.

These events took place in the summer of 1490; and there is reason* to suppose that the new *Castellano* had then been his liege lady's husband for several months. The marriage, though a perfectly legitimate one in the eyes of the Church, was, and remained a rigidly guarded secret; not only because it was a wholly unavowable mesalliance, but because according the public law of the Holy Roman Empire, Catherine's second marriage would have entailed deprivation of the guardianship of her children.

It was, as may be supposed, by no means a prudent thing even to allude to a secret of such importance. A poor ignorant artisan, who had been overheard saying, that somebody had told him, that somebody else had said that their lady had married her *Castellano*, was forthwith summoned to the presence of the Countess, who, after a few words spoken with a severity which half frightened him out of his senses, ordered him at once to be put on the rack: from which torture, says the historian, he barely escaped with his life. We may be very sure, that few words were ever whispered even in Forlì on so dangerous a subject. And the reverend biographer, who relates the above incident, seems as if he hardly felt safe two hundred years afterwards in meddling with such state secrets, remarking apologetically, that he merely notifies the fact, that his readers may not think any ill when they at a later period meet with mention of a son of

* Burriel, p. 446.

Catherine's named Giacomo, born somewhere about this time.

In truth, the Forli public had little cause to pay any attention to this portion of the private life of their sovereign. For in all respects as far as regarded them, and as far as the world could see, Catherine was still sovereign Countess, and Giacomo Feo still *Castellano* of Ravaldino, and nothing more. All that could be done for her young husband without lifting him from the rank of a subject, Catherine delighted in accomplishing. Thus, we find her obtaining for him from her brother at Milan some order of chivalry, all the insignia of which were duly sent by the hands of proper heraldic personages from that splendid court. The noblest knights of the most conspicuous families in Forli invested the young man, one with cloak, another with collar, and another with spurs; and there were grand festivities, and Catherine was, it is written, in the highest spirits.

Her new marriage, we are especially told, in no wise made her neglectful of her duties towards her children, and especially that of constantly attending to their education, and superintending it in a great measure personally. She took infinite pains in seeking for the best masters, and in ascertaining for what career each of her sons was by nature most adapted. We learn further, without surprise, that she was a careful and prudent, rather than an indulgent mother; and find her acquiring the praise of contemporary writers by "never caressing her children," and never allowing them to come into her presence, save in full state costume, and requiring them to maintain a grave and decorous demeanor to match!*

* Burriel, lib. ii. cap. xviii.

For the rest, public affairs go on much the same as during the lifetime of Girolamo. The conspiracies are hatched and detected much as usual. That troublesome Ordelaffi knows no middle course between love and murder. As Catherine would not listen to him on the former topic, he is continually plotting to compass the latter. Now in Imola, now in Forlì, and now in some one of the outlying fortresses of the small state, some little conspiracy is continually being discovered and crushed by the lady's prudence and vigilance. A few traitors, found guilty of being in correspondence with the pretender, are hung, a few others banished,—and then things are quiet for a few months.

As usual, the finance question is found to be the most difficult and abstruse part of the whole science of governing. The court of Forlì is maintained, we hear, on as magnificent a scale as that of many larger states. And money must be had. But Madama is a good manager; and strives much to find some means of making a full treasury not absolutely incompatible with a fair show of prosperity among the tax-payers; not, unhappily, with much success.

Once Madama thought she had found the Aladdin's lamp at last. The great Via Emilia, high road from Milan, Bologna, Venice, and all Germany, to Rome, runs through our towns of Imola and Forlì. Suppose we put up, as we have a clear right to do, a turnpike-gate,—say two toll-bars,—one at either end of our territory, and so fleece travellers to the most needful replenishing of our own coffers, and every way desirable lightening of the burdens of our faithful subjects. How strange never to have thought of it before!

So the new toll-bars are forthwith erected; but to the great surprise of Madama and her counsellors with

very much less result than had been anticipated ; with little other result indeed than a few broken heads and bloody noses, arising from the scuffles of the toll-bar keepers with violent travellers who decline paying the new imposition. This was all natural enough ; but the strange thing is, that the traffic most notably falls off. Travellers won't come to be taxed. Ducky won't come to be killed. With a perverse cunning, most provoking, men go round another way ; some stay at home and don't go at all ; and the toll-bars barely pay the expense of their keepers. Then the Pesaro folk, whose communications with the neighbouring towns are much interrupted by the Lady Catherine's new toll-bars, take it into their heads to retaliate, by seizing every Forli man who ventures to show his face within their jurisdiction, weighing him publicly on a steel yard by the road-side, and taxing him so much a pound, as if he were hogflesh or mutton, to the great amusement and scoffing of the cities round about, and the infinite scandal and discomfiture of the men of Forli.

But Catherine was a wise princess, and in a very short time got a lesson in finance from her new scheme, which some other princes have failed to learn from the experience of centuries ; and the unsuccessful toll-bars were quietly removed.

Another somewhat curious matter, in which we find Madama engaged about this time, was the providing Forli, both on her own behalf and that of her subjects, with one of the most necessary conveniences of civilised life, of which the city had been destitute since the riots at the time of the Count's death. The banks and pawnshops of two wealthy Jews had been then broken into and pillaged, and their owners frightened into abandoning the city. And now if a Christian had need of

a little ready cash, where was he to look for it? Money absolutely needed, and not a Jew within hail! Madama felt that this was a state of things calling for immediate remedy. So special overtures were made to a wealthy Israelite of Bologna to come and settle in Forlì. The Jew admitted the urgent necessity of the case, but bearing in mind recent events, deemed it no more than common prudence to stipulate, that an instrument should be drawn up and executed in due legal form, by which the sovereign, state, and municipality, of Forlì, should be bound to indemnify him for any loss to his capital or property that might occur from revolution or other violence. This was promptly acceded to; the Jew was installed in Forlì, to the great joy of its ever-orthodox, but often out-at-elbows, Christian population; and, by Madama's wise provision, her lieges could once again get their little bills done as heretofore.

Meantime, Innocent VIII. died; and in August of the same year, 1492, the Sacred College announced "*Urbi et Orbi*" that they had been inspired by the Holy Spirit to elect as Heaven's Vicegerent on earth, the Cardinal Roderigo Borgia; one, who may be safely assumed, without any careful scanning of the members of the college, to have been the worst of those offered to their choice, inasmuch as history has assigned to him the portentous pre-eminence of being the worst of the successors of St. Peter. English readers have no idea what this Pope, Alexander VI., was; and no English page can dare to tell them. Studious men, who feel, that, inasmuch as despite all change of time and circumstance, similar causes will, in the moral world as certainly as in the physical world, produce similar effects, it is therefore fitting that such cess-

pools of abominations should be sounded by those who for the sake of the general health ought to be conversant with every form of disease,—these may in the cynical unblushing dead Latin of Burckhardt the diarist, look on the loathsome picture of life in the Vatican under this Father of Christendom. For others let it suffice, that this man, chosen by the Church by infallible inspiration, for the infallible guidance of Christian souls, was such, that no human soul could be in communication with his without deep injury and degradation.

This man, as Cardinal under Sixtus IV., had been his vice-chancellor, and a steady adherent of the Riarii. He was the sponsor chosen by the young Count and Countess to hold at the font their first-born son. And the friendship which existed, and was thus specially marked, between them and such a man as the Cardinal Borgia, cannot but be felt to have the force of unfavourable evidence in our estimate of them.

Catherine, however, considered the news of Borgia's elevation to be most important to her interests, and highly satisfactory. Two envoys on behalf of Forlì, and two³ on behalf of Imola, were despatched to Rome to compliment the new Pope on his election, and offer the homage of the Countess and her son. Being very well received by his Holiness, they begged that he would grant that a Jubilee, with plenary absolution, might be held for three successive years in two churches of the Franciscans in Forlì, which was graciously accorded, with the condition however that a fresh bull should be applied for each year; which was only laying a small tax on the profits of the Jubilee. Such a grant was not uncommon. But the result of the three years' speculation, as recorded by

the Forlì historians, is curious. The first year brought 2500 lire, with which the monks of one church built a cloister, and the nuns of the other put a new roof to their chapel, and newly fitted out a miraculous Virgin. The second year's produce was almost nothing, because the brief enabling the convents to absolve from homicide did not arrive in time. And the third year, they got only 184 lire, because the Apostolic Court, having then more important matters in hand, again neglected to send the necessary brief in due time.

Up to this period the life of Catherine has been passed altogether in that good time,—those halcyon days for Italy described by Guicciardini in the opening of his great work, and marked by him as coming to an end in the fatal year, 1494. To readers more conversant with the regular well-ordered course of life in the nineteenth century than with that of the fifteenth, it may seem, that the little magic-lantern-like peeps at the men and things of that old time, offered to them in the foregoing pages, can hardly be deemed samples of that happy condition so regretfully commemorated by the great historian. Murders of princes, and awards of torture and death to their conspiring subjects, recurring in oscillations of pendulum-like regularity,—civil war in the streets of Rome, and monstrous corruption in her palaces,—lawless violence of the law-making classes, met by continually successful evasion of the law by those for whose oppression rather than protection it was intended: all this does not represent to our ideas a happy state of society.

But Guicciardini looks back to these days from amid the misfortunes of a far more disastrous period. The good old days,—when Italian throats were throttled only by Italian hands; when the tyrants were Italian tyrants

not too strong to be occasionally knocked on the head by Italian rebels; when the wealth extorted from the people by splendid princes was at least scattered among them again by their splendour; when, in a word, Italy, manage it as they might, was for the Italians,—were sighed for as a golden age in that iron period, when the barbarian from beyond the Alps had come down upon them.

Charles VIII., of France, was the second Attila, who headed an inroad of barbarians, from whose gripe on some part of her body, soft Italy has never since been able to shake herself free. That ambitious Prince undertook to make good certain old standing genealogical claims to the sovereignty of Naples, long since advanced by France; and marched into Italy with an army for that purpose in the summer of 1494. It would lead us too far away into the great high-road of the history of that time, if we were to attempt to trace an intelligible picture of the dissensions and jealousies among the princes of Italy, which made that moment appear peculiarly opportune for the prosecution of his claims. We have only to deal with the immediate result of the great calamity to Forlì and its Countess.

Those rich alluvial flats of Romagna were capital fighting ground, and lay besides just on the high road of the French troops southwards. And on the 18th of August the main body of the Neapolitan troops were at Cesena, about twelve miles to the south; and five days later the French troops were at Bologna, some thirty miles to the north of Forlì. The little state found itself in a sufficiently dangerous position under any circumstances. But the situation was rendered yet more difficult by the necessity of taking one or the other side, when there were strong reasons for taking

neither. The Duke of Milan, Catherine's brother, and her uncle "Ludovico il Moro," who, in fact, held the power of Milan in his hands, were allies of the French king. On the other hand, the Pope had allied himself with the King of Naples; and Forlì was held as a fief of the Church; and all Catherine's sympathies, and her Riario connections,—among whom were two cardinals high in the confidence of the Pontiff,—drew her towards the party taken by the court of Rome.

The decision was difficult; and Catherine was long in deciding. Repeated embassies were seen in those days arriving from the hostile camps, and departing without having obtained the promise they wished.

Meantime, Madama was busily engaged in preparing, as best she might, for the storm which was sure to burst over Forlì, whichever side she might decide on supporting. Men were sent throughout the whole territory warning the peasants of the plains to leave their homes, and betake themselves* with such property as was moveable to places of safety. The time of vintage was close at hand, and it was hard to leave the fruit of the year's labour to be gathered by others. But to have remained would only have been to lose all that might have been moved, and probably life itself, as well as that which they were compelled to leave behind them. So, throughout the length and breadth of the plains around Forlì, long trains of the cultivators of the soil, with their families and cattle, might be seen moving into the shelter of the over-crowded cities, or towards the comparatively safe recesses of the Apennine.

At length, after much vacillation and long bargain-

* Burriel, p. 492.

ing, Madama declared herself the ally of the King of Naples. The principal conditions were, that both Naples and Rome should guarantee the defence of her states; and that Octavian, her eldest son, then seventeen years old, should receive the rank of General in the allied army with a large stipend.*

The historians of Forlì, and especially Burriel, Catherine's biographer, insist much on the pause in the movements of the two armies, while encamped respectively at Bologna and at Cesena, while either party strove by repeated efforts to obtain her alliance. It would not be credible, Burriel remarks, that the generals of two armies, each of about 16,000 men, should have lost so much time, and taken so much trouble to secure the friendship of so small a principality, if all the chroniclers did not accord in their clear statements, that such was the case. And they point out, with much municipal pride, the high position and authority which these circumstances indicate Catherine to have attained among her contemporaries. The observation is a fair one. And the evident importance attached by both the contending parties to the friendship of a state so entirely unimportant on the score of its power, is very remarkable.

The alliance with Naples, which Madama had been so slow to form, she was very quick to break. A few successes on the part of the French seem to have caused a greater degree of discouragement among their enemies than was reasonable. The Pope recalled his troops from Romagna, and the Duke of Calabria began to draw off his forces southwards. In these circumstances, which would seem to have left Forlì exposed

* Guicciardini, lib. i.; Bonoli, vol. ii. p. 270.

to certain destruction, and to have been totally at variance with the conditions that had been stipulated for its protection, Catherine sought to secure the safety of her little state by suddenly changing sides and becoming at the shortest possible notice the friend of the winning party. The measure was not wholly successful: for the Duke of Calabria in retiring southwards, angry as he might well be with the Countess, ravaged the country as he passed to the utmost of his power.

The French troops remained in the neighbourhood of Forlì as friends till the 23rd of November, at which time they proceeded to cross the Apennine to join King Charles, who had arrived at Florence on the 18th of that month. They were friends, but friends whose departure was seen with no small satisfaction; for the difficulty and cost of feeding them, and inducing them to abstain from helping themselves had been extreme.

During this time of trouble and continual anxiety, Giacomo Feo had been governor-general of Catherine's states. He seems to have efficiently seconded the dexterous management, by which Catherine succeeded in bringing her little state through this critical time in an only half-ruined condition; and Madama, determined, says Burriel, not to let such an opportunity as having these French generals at Forlì slip away without making something out of it, obtained by their means the rank and title of baron for her General and husband from the King of France.

The young General was, we are told, beyond measure elated at the possession of this coveted preferment; and Madama was as pleased to have gratified him with it. But, it would seem, that the gift was a fatal one.

On the 27th of August, 1495, Catherine and her sons and Feo had gone out of Forlì on a hunting excursion. The party were returning to the city in the evening; Madama, and some of her sons, were in a carriage, Feo was riding behind them on horseback. Now, seven* citizens of Imola and Forlì, some nobles, some priests, and some peasants, had sworn together that they would that day kill the favourite. So they posted themselves at a spot within the city walls, by which the Court party were sure to pass on their return; and there, letting the carriage with Catherine and her sons pass on unmolested, they stabbed the unfortunate young husband with a pike through the body, so that with one cry he fell dead.

It is of no interest to chronicle the obscure names of these assassins. But it is worth remarking that most, if not all of them, were personally known to their victim. And this is a circumstance, that in almost every case characterises these mediæval assassinations of Italian princes. The murderers are not politically fanatical regicides, who for the working out of some theory or hope, salve their consciences with the plea of necessity for the removal of a man whom they have perhaps never seen, and certainly never known. They are men in the habit of daily intercourse with him, and strike with all the virulence of personal hate. The victim apostrophises them by their Christian names, not unconscious in all probability of the items in the score thus finally settled.

In the case of this unfortunate young Feo, as far as can be judged† from the scanty notices of the provincial historians, his death seems to have been due to

* Burriel, p. 579.

† Bonoli, vol. ii. p. 274; Burriel, p. 579; Vecchiazzani, vol. ii. p. 187.

the jealousy occasioned by the reiterated honours showered upon him. This obscure young man, a stranger from Savona, some place, they say, away beyond Genoa, is brought here, raised above all the ancient nobility of the country, made Cavaliere, Conte, Castellano, Governor-General; and now not content with all that, must needs be a French Baron too! This last preferment seems from some feeling to have been the most irksome and most odious of all to the Forlivesi. Come what might, they would not be lorded over by a French Baron!

And thus, at the age of thirty-three, Catherine was for the second time after five years of marriage, the widow of a murdered husband.

CHAPTER VIII.

Guilty or not guilty again.—Medieval clanship.—A woman's vengeance.—Funeral honours.—Royal-mindedness.—Its costliness; and its mode of raising the wind.—Taxes spent in alms to ruined taxpayers.—Threatening times.—Giovanni de' Medici.—Catherine once more wife, mother, and widow.

CATHERINE, with two of her sons in the carriage with her, had advanced but a few yards beyond the spot where the murder was committed, when, alarmed by the cries of the conspirators and of her own retinue, she looked back, and became at once aware of the truth. The whole of the attendants, except two, who made a futile attempt to kill or arrest the assassins, immediately dispersed themselves, and fled in different directions. The seven conspirators did likewise; and Catherine and her sons, hastily throwing themselves on horses taken from the grooms, galloped at full speed to the fortress. And the murdered man's body was left alone in a ditch near the spot where he was slain, till late that night it was removed to a neighbouring church by "some decent and compassionate people" who lived hard by. The ballet-master historian* Cobelli went to look on it, as it lay in the ditch, and pours forth a flood of voluble lamentations over the beauty of the body thus mutilated and disfigured, and that of his gold brocade jacket and rose-coloured pantaloons besmeared with mud. †

* Cobelli, p. 277.

† Note 12.

Necessity for providing for their own safety may furnish some excuse for Catherine and her sons' precipitate retreat to the citadel. Her husband was beyond all need of assistance, and her sons' security, and that of her dominions, was in imminent danger. For it was probable enough, that the assassination just committed almost under her eyes was the first outbreak of one of those plans for restoring the old dynasty that were so constantly occurring.

Such, however, does not seem to have been the case. The popular indignation against the perpetrators of Feo's murder was at once strongly manifested. They were that night hunted through the town, and most of them dragged prisoners to the piazza before the morning.

There, before the assembled crowd, Gian Antonio Ghetti, the principal of them, declared to the magistrates that Feo had been put to death by the express order of Catherine and Octavian; and the others loudly confirmed his assertion.* There does not seem to have been the slightest attempt made to test the truth of these declarations by separately examining and cross-questioning the assassins. But it is remarkable, that the *Auditor*, Catherine's chief magistrate, does not appear to have considered this explanation at all impossible. On the contrary, he found himself in a position of difficulty, evidently fearing, that if he proceeded at once on the supposition, that these men were to be treated as murderers and traitors, his zeal might possibly turn out to have been expended on the wrong side. In this difficulty "the worthy magistrate" beckoned from the crowd a young man whom he could

* Burriel, p. 532.

trust, and with a few whispered words despatched him in all haste to the fortress, dexterously holding law in leash the while.

In a very short time the messenger returned, and our "worthy magistrate" was himself again. It was all right. Murder was murder. Law was to "have its course;" and quartering alive, dragging at horses tails, and other ingenious devices of the sort were to be resorted to, according to the most approved precedents.

But are these orders from the citadel as efficacious in disproving the truth of Gian Antonio's assertion before the tribunal of history, as they were in making the Auditor's course clear before him? The [learned Litta, in his great work on the Families of Italy thinks not. He writes,* "Feo was killed by conspirators in 1495: if, indeed, it were not Catherine herself who ordered his death." But we know that suspicion of crime becomes morbidly active in those whose duties make them continually conversant with criminals; and in estimating the value of Litta's impressions, great allowance must be made for the mental bias of one who spent his life in chronicling the *Fasti* of the noble families of Italy.

No contemporary writer gives the slightest indication of any suspicion of the possible truth of this audacious inculpation of the widowed princess having existed at the time. It is true, that if such suspicions had existed, they would probably have been deep buried in the hearts of those who conceived them. But all the probabilities of the case plead in favour of Catherine's innocence upon this occasion. Had she

* Litta. *Famig. de' Medici*.

wished to rid herself of her young husband, nothing would have been easier than to have made an end of him, privately, quietly, and safely, in the secrecy of the fort or of the palace. It is curious to observe, that when subsequently she condescended to point out the absurdity of the accusation, she made use of this argument; remarking, as the historian records it, that "Thank God, neither she nor any of her family had need to apply to common bravoës, when they saw fit to make away with their enemies!" Had she even chosen to employ bravoës for the purpose, with the intention of leaving to them the responsibility of the deed, it might have been done far more safely in the palace than in the street. The latter necessarily involved a very considerable degree of danger of popular tumult, and ever-menacing, ever-near revolution. In the confusion and excitement following the perpetration of such a deed, it may be said to have been merely a toss up which way the popular mind, so easily moved to violence, so prone to change, might turn.

There is, indeed, no more curiously suggestive and striking proof of the chronic state of discontent, uneasiness, and discomfort, in which men lived in those good old times, than this wonderful readiness to turn any incident of sufficient interest to make a couple of score of tongues shout together, into an occasion for seeking to change for another the rider mounted on their galled shoulders, at whatsoever almost certain cost of ruin and destruction to them and theirs.

Them and theirs;—for another very noticeable trait of Italian social life in those centuries is the great strength of the clannish tie, which made all the members of a family responsible for, and generally partakers in

the political crimes of any one among them. The fathers, sons, brothers, uncles of a baffled, detected, or overpowered conspirator, share his fate. Often the females of a family are involved in the condemnation. The whole race is to be rooted out. And such an award seems to have been generally accepted as natural, and to be expected, at least, if not as just, by the suffering party. In most cases the members of a political assassin's family adopted his views, and more or less actively shared his crime.

In the present instance, the vengeance of the bereaved wife took a yet wider sweep. Not only were the families of the guilty men, even women and innocent children and infants at the breast, slaughtered indiscriminately; but the slightest cause of suspicion sufficed to involve others wholly unconnected with them in destruction.* This seems to have been the only occasion in the strangely varied life of Catherine, when evil passions, unmingled with political reasons, or calculations of expediency, governed her conduct, and urged her to excesses of cruelty. And it is impossible to avoid comparing the calm, judicial proceedings, and not wholly unreasonable chastisement, consequent upon the death of Riario, with the wild excesses of vindictive fury that followed that of Giacomo Feo. Surely it cannot be supposed that all this was simulated rage, acted out in such terrible earnest, merely to divert suspicion from herself as the murderess! Not even acquaintance with the unnatural atrocities so common in that age and clime, nor the wonderful deadness of the moral sense which prevailed, can justify so shocking a belief.

* Burriel, lib. iii. chap. ii.

No! Either we must suppose, that passing years, the habits of despotism, familiarity with bloodshed, and much trouble and adversity had potently changed Catherine's character for the worse. Or we must, with perhaps more probability, seek an explanation of her altered conduct in the difference of the feelings the two bereavements may be supposed to have occasioned. In the first case, we have a princess decorously mourning; and with high stern justice punishing the political fanatics, who had taken from her a husband, the partner indeed of her greatness, and fellow-labourer in the toils of ambition; but one, who had been assigned to her solely for the purposes of that ambition, and whom no preference or personal sympathy had had any share in selecting. In the second instance, we have a woman, raging with tiger-like fury against the murderers of her love. This so faultlessly beautiful form, ruthlessly made a mangled corpse before her eyes, was the first and last love of this vehement and strong-willed woman;—her only taste of real natural heart's joy;—the one pet, private sanctuary of her life, not dedicated to the weary life-long toil of building up the Riario name. Hence the almost indiscriminate slaughter, hanging, quartering, torturing, banishments, and ruin, that scared all Forlì with fear who next might be the victim, when Giacomo Feo fell. Above forty persons, counting men, women, and children, were put to death, of whom the greater part were in all probability wholly innocent of any participation in the crime! More than fifty others suffered lesser degrees of persecution.

In the midst of these horrors, while the mutilated bodies of some of the victims were still hanging before the palace of the *Podestà*, exposed to the public view, a most magnificent funeral ceremony was performed in

honour of the murdered Feo. Burriel describes the long line of ecclesiastical, military, and civic dignitaries, with pages, musicians, ladies, friars, soldiers, and three squires in cloth of gold, on horses similarly caprisoned, who bore the sword, spurs, helmet, and cuirass of the deceased, moving to the sound of loud-chanted dirges from the fortress to the cathedral. The procession must have passed with its wailing *De profundis* and *Miserere* chants, and its glittering heraldic braveries, by the spot where the ghastly remains of the victims, for whom was no "miserere," were polluting the air in the hot summer sunshine. And the entire scene in its setting of picturesque Italian city architecture, with its startling contrasts, and suggestiveness of unbridled passions, and deeds of lawless violence, would seem to be marked characteristically enough by the impress of medieval peculiarities. But Burriel says, that the similitude of the spectacle to that described by Virgil, as having taken place at the funeral of Pallas, son of King Evander, was so great, that it may be supposed that Catherine had modelled the one in imitation of the other!

By the combined soothing of funeral services, and gratified vengeance, the bereaved widow was, it should seem, sufficiently consoled, to engage herself, early in the year 1496, in extensive projects of palace building, and acquisition of parks and pleasure-grounds. The alterations and improvements, which Madama was now bent on, mark characteristically the change in the habits and desires of the powerful and wealthy, which was now beginning to manifest itself. Increasing magnificence and luxury demanded ampler opportunity for its display, and a pleasanter field for its enjoyment. Italian princes began to be no longer

content to pass their lives immured in the high dungeon-like walls of ancient feudal mansions, in the heart of walled and gloomy cities.

And Catherine was not likely to be among the slowest to adopt any new mode of increased magnificence and splendour. There were, moreover, dark and sad reminiscences enough attached to the old seignorial residence in the *piazza*, to make it odious to the lady twice widowed there, under circumstances in themselves, and in their consequences, so painful to look back on.

So all that portion of the ancient building, which had been used for the personal accommodation of the Princess, was thrown down; and its materials contributed towards the erection of a new palace, at the extremity of the city, near to the fortress Ravaldino, and connected with it by one of the gateways of the town. The pleasures and splendour, which the tastes of the new age demanded, were thus admirably made compatible with the old time provision for security, which could by no means yet be dispensed with. For material was advancing more rapidly than moral civilisation.

Outside the wall, in connection with the new palace, a large tract of land was purchased* for orchards, gardens, dairy pastures, "a great wood, in which were wild beasts of various kinds for the lord's diversion of hunting," and every kind of device, by which the inmates "might at all hours enjoy the pleasures of the country unobserved." The place was, "from its magnificence and beauty, named the Paradise;"† and in all the preparations for making her Paradise perfect,

* Burriel, p. 629.

† Bonoli, vol. ii. p. 277.

Catherine "left nothing unattempted, which could be a proof of greatness and of a royal mind."

But there is a vile, ignoble difficulty, that ever dogs and hampers this sort of proof of a great and royal mind. Paradises are not produced in iron, brazen, or leaden ages, without abundant supply of cash. Royal minds have, accordingly, been ever exceedingly apt to show their quality by a remarkable fertility of expedient for the procuring of this base means for great aims. And Burriel details for us, with much admiration, the method hit upon by Catherine for paying for her new palace and park.

There were, it seems, and for generations had been, certain taxes, to which lands in the territory of Forlì possessed by peasants were liable, and which were not paid by such as were in the hands of citizens. The unjust difference, it is to be remarked, does not appear to have been made between patrician and plebeian as such, but between countryman and townsman. The possessors of these unequally-taxed lands were, as might be supposed, an impoverished class, continually sinking towards utter destitution, and numbers of the peasant proprietors sold their land to prosperous citizens "for a bit of bread," says the historian, thus baulking the tax-gatherer and depopulating the country. As it was necessary to find a remedy for this growing evil, and as the simple one of equalising the tax was an idea far too opposed to the whole fabric of medieval political economy to enter for a moment even into the head of anyone, it was enacted, that no peasant should sell his land under heavy penalties, and forfeiture of the land by the buyer.

Now this wise law, as is usually the case with such, was very frequently evaded by the connivance of

parties anxious, the one to sell and the other to buy, and it was found extremely difficult to bring the illegality home to offenders. But it so happened, that just at the time of Catherine's greatest need, the "Bargello" or gaol-governor of Imola was himself committed to prison for the non-payment of a fine of 200 ducats imposed on him for some mal-practices in his office. It seems, however, that besides the delinquencies for which he had been condemned, he had been in the habit of lending some official facilities to the illegal bargains for land between peasants and townsmen. Reflecting, therefore, on his own position and that of his sovereign lady, it struck this shrewd and worthy "Bargello," that he might find the means of making his undetected offences pay the penalty for those which had been discovered. So he caused a communication to be made to Madama to the effect, that if his liberty were granted him, and pardon assured to him for anything in respect to which he might perchance compromise himself, in certain revelations he proposed making to her, he thought he could put her in a way to find the necessary funds for her new palace and park, without doing wrong to anyone.

This latter clause was a *sine quâ non* with Catherine of course ; but on the understanding that that condition was to be faithfully observed, she closed with her "Bargello's" offer at once. So that useful and clever officer came up to Forlì from his prison in Imola with a long list, all duly prepared, of all the illegal land-sales for a long time past. Twenty-five lire, was the fine due from each seller, and total forfeiture of the purchased lands the much heavier penalty to be levied on each buyer. Intense was the consternation through-

out Forlì and its county! And rich and abundant the harvest reaped by the sovereign.

So our good "Bargello" is liberated and graciously pardoned. No wrong is done to anybody, since, on the contrary, law is enforced, and right therefore done. "Paradise" is won, and duly paid for, and remains, as the historian Bonoli so judiciously remarks, a proof of the royal-mindedness of its noble builder.

It has been mentioned that the unequal pressure of this land-tax had caused a vast amount of pauperism and destitution; and the presence of pestilence in Forlì and its territory both this year and the last, following in the wake of an army of foreign troops, as has so often happened, had terribly increased the evil. This and other oppressive taxes were, therefore, more necessary than ever, for Catherine (besides the cost of her improvements, so happily paid for out of nothing at all, as one may say,) was at great expenses for the alleviation of the increasing misery. She bought corn, she organised means of relief, she hired medical men from foreign parts, she founded confraternities for charitable purposes, but she repealed no taxes. How could she with such imperative calls on her for alms?

Can it be that splendid princes find it more congenial to royal-minded tastes, and more convenient to royal-minded habits, to reign over alms-fed mendicants than over prosperous self-fed freemen? Then again, what says Mother Church? Is not almsgiving the broadest of all the roads to heaven? And how are the rich to buy off their own sins in conformity with orthodox rule, if there are no beggars?

But among all the cares and occupations arising out of the twofold business of advancing her own splendour and alleviating the misery of her subjects, Catherine

found time to think of yet another matter of still greater importance than either of these. Madama was now meditating a third marriage, and this time she seems to have returned to the plan of marrying from policy and ambition. Probably the increasing storminess of the political horizon, and the consequent precariousness of the position of all the smaller princes of Italy, made her deem it desirable to seek the support which a connexion with some important and powerful family would afford her. In truth, it was the eve of a period, during which it was hardly to be expected that any unaided female hand, however virile in its energy, would be able to retain its grasp of a sceptre; and considering the matter in this point of view, she could not, probably, have chosen more prudently than she did.

For the last year past, Giovanni de' Medici had been residing in Forlì as Ambassador from the Republic of Florence. He was great-grandson of that Giovanni who was the common ancestor of the two great branches of the family. That founder of the Medicean greatness had two sons, the elder of whom was Cosmo, "pater patriæ," from whom descended the elder branch, including among its scions Lorenzo the Magnificent, the two Popes Leo X. and Clement VII., and Catherine, the wife of Henry II. of France, and becoming extinct in the person of Alexander first Duke of Florence, murdered in 1537. Giovanni's second son, the younger brother of Cosmo, was Lorenzo, the grandfather of that Giovanni who now was the envoy in Forlì from the Republic of Florence.

When, therefore, in the early part of the summer of 1497, Catherine gave her hand to Giovanni de' Medici, however much this, her third marriage, may have been

a matter of calculated prudence and state policy, she at least had a sufficient knowledge of the man whom she was about to make her husband. Madama was now thirty-five years of age, while Giovanni was only thirty. He had not, and has never occupied any very conspicuous place in history; but what little we hear of him is favourable. He had fought with credit, in France, under Charles VIII., and had brought back with him to Florence, a French patent of nobility, and a pension of two thousand crowns a-year, the gifts of that monarch. He had also the credit of a wise and prudent negociator and statesman.

There is extant among the Florence archives a letter from Savonarola to Catherine, dated from the Convent of St. Mark, the 18th of June, 1477, of which a few copies have recently been printed by the Count Carlo Capponi at Florence. The contents are of little interest, being merely general exhortations to piety, to God-fearing conduct in the government of her states. But it is somewhat remarkable that this letter must have been written just about the time of her marriage with Giovanni de' Medici; which yet was, like the preceding union with Feo, and for the same reasons, kept perfectly secret. Yet, as there is no reason to think, that the reforming friar had any correspondence with Catherine, either previously or subsequently, it can hardly be doubted, that this letter of exhortation was motived by the occasion of the marriage; and that the friar, friar-like, knew all about it, however secret it may have been kept.

This wholly volunteered and unpreached sermon from the friar to a foreign princess, is a trait worth noting of the social position arrogated to themselves by the spiritual teachers of that day.

Of this union, however, of the great houses of Sforza and Medici, the most, and indeed the only important result was the birth of a son baptised Ludovico, on the 6th of April, in the year 1498. The name Ludovico was, a few months later, changed to Giovanni; and this child became that celebrated Giovanni "Delle Bande Nere," who acquired an European reputation as the greatest captain of his day, and from whom descended the long line of Tuscan Grand-Dukes of the Medicean race. For Cosmo, his son and Catherine's grandson, succeeded to that dignity on the extinction of the elder branch of the family.

Through this Giovanni, moreover, Catherine's eighth child and seventh son, she is the ancestress of that Maria de' Medici who became the wife of Henry IV. of France, and by him the progenitress of all the Bourbons, who have sat on the thrones of France, Spain, Naples, Parma, and Lucca; and who, by her daughter Henrietta, the wife of Charles I., was the mother of an equally royal, and almost equally pernicious race.

It cannot be said, therefore, that this third marriage of Catherine was unimportant or barren of results; though, upon her own fortunes, it had little influence; for Giovanni, whose health appears to have been for some time failing, died six months after the birth of his son, on the 14th of September, 1498.

His physicians had sent him to one of the little bathing-places in the Apennines, called St. Piero, in Bagno. There finding himself becoming rapidly worse, he sent in haste to call Catherine from Forlì, who reached his bedside barely in time to receive his last words; and was thus, for the third time, left a widow at a moment when every appearance in the political

horizon seemed to indicate that she was on the eve of events that would make the protection of a husband, and a powerful alliance, more necessary to her than it had ever yet been.

CHAPTER IX.

A nation of good haters.—Madama's soldier trade.—A new Pope has to found a new family.—Catherine's bounty to recruits.—A shrewd dealer meets his match.—Signs of hard times.—How to manage a free council.—Forlì ungrateful.—Catherine at bay.—“A Borgia! A Borgia!”—A new year's eve party in 1500.—The lioness in the toils.—Catherine led captive to Rome.

DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON ought to have been a warm admirer of Italian character had he been acquainted with it; for he “liked a good hater.” And assuredly the leading physiological characteristic which colours the whole course of Italian history, and furnishes the most universally-applicable master-key to the understanding of its intricacies, is the intensity of mutually-repellant aversion which has always existed among all the constituent elements of society. Private hatred between man and man; clan hatred between family and family; party hatred between blacks and whites, or longs and shorts, or any other distinctive faction-cry; political hatred between patricians and plebeians; social hatred between citizens and the inhabitants of the fields around their walls; and, by no means least though last, municipal hatred between one city and another, has ever been in Italy the master passion, vigorous in its action and notable in its results in proportion to the vigour of social life animating the body of the nation.

Orsini clans no longer level Colonna palaces with

the soil in the streets of Rome ; the story-graven flagstones of the old Florentine Piazza are no longer stained with the blood of *Bianchi* or *Neri* ; Siena no more sends out her war-car against Pisa, nor does Genoa fit out fleets against Venice. Despotism has crushed out all vigour from the life and torpified every pulse ; and having made a deathlike “ solitude, calls it peace.”

And has not, then, Despotism done well, even on the showing of the preceding statements ? asks its apologists.

The true and enlightened believer in a god-governance, and no devil-governance, of the world, will of course answer unhesitatingly, No ! But to answer from the conscience, No !—with faith still as firm as when the nineteenth century was young and proud with chimerical hopes — to answer with convictions still undefeated by the defeats of '48, for ever No !—requires, it must be admitted, a strong and clear belief in the immutability of the causes that result in human good and evil ; a lively perception of the truth that no faults of a nation's life can best be remedied by national death ; and such a whole-hearted persuasion of the universality of God's law of progress as can cast out all doubt of the fact, that every nation on earth's surface must either advance to improved civilisation, or else prepare to quit the scene, as some little improvable peoples have done and are doing, and leave the valuable space they occupy to more highly-gifted races.

The Italian writers of every age, from the sixteenth century to the present day, are naturally inclined to attribute all the misfortunes of their country to foreign wrong-doing and aggression. And they date the sunset of Italian prosperity, as Guicciardini does in the

passage previously referred to, from the French invasion in the last years of the fifteenth century. But not even the dangers to be anticipated from the pretensions of the French monarch, nor the actual presence of foreign troops on the soil of Italy, could avail to check, even for a time, the deadly hatred of city against city.

This had blazed out fatally between Florence and Pisa in 1496, and was still raging in the early months of 1499. Pisa was assisted by the Venetians; and the strength of the two maritime republics seems to have tried the resources of the Florentines severely. Like the other second-rate princes of Italy, our "Madama di Forlì" drove a considerable and important trade in hireling troops. This species of business was in every respect profitable to the rulers of these petty states. They thus, besides pocketing considerable sums, maintained bodies of troops owing allegiance to them and fighting under their flag, which their own resources would have been wholly insufficient to support. And the power of hiring out these to either of two contending powers caused their alliance to be bid for by their more powerful neighbours, and gave them an importance in the political calculations of the time disproportioned to the size of their little territories.

Madama had had considerable dealings of this sort with the Florentines. Ottaviano had taken service with the wealthy republicans, and drew a handsome stipend from them as General. Early in 1499 the Republic had sent proposals for a fresh body of troops, and Madama desired nothing better than to execute the order. But times were hard in Forlì, and were daily threatening to become harder. Pestilence had been raging throughout the city and territory, and had

inopportunately raised the value of the raw material of armies.

Worse still, in March of this year Pope Alexander, in full conclave, had declared Catherine and sundry other little potentates of Romagna deposed from their sovereignties, for not having punctually paid up their dues to the Apostolic Chamber. Catherine, indeed, forthwith sent up envoys to Rome—doctors learned in law and others—to point out to Pope Alexander that there was an outstanding account due to her late husband, the noble Count Riario, which had not been settled at the time of Sixtus IV.'s death; and that she would readily pay anything that at a fair settling might be found due. One would have thought that a Riario's wife might have known the Apostolic court better than to have taken such useless trouble. Did she think Uncle Sixtus of holy memory was the only Pope who had a family to found? Of course her envoys were sent about their business without having been allowed to speak a syllable of their errand.

These dues, a feudal tribute always reserved to the Holy See in its bulls of investiture, seem rarely to have been heard anything of as long as a friendly pope occupied the chair of St. Peter; but as soon as ever an excuse was wanted at Rome for getting rid of an obnoxious princeling, the Holy Father looked up his ledger and pronounced sentence of dechéance against the debtor.

Now, Pope Alexander had sons, whom he did not even take the trouble of calling nephews; and he was, to say the least, quite as royal-minded as the Franciscan Sixtus. His eldest hope, Cesare Borgia, was exceeding royal-minded too. And so the Borgias had to be founded as well as the Riarii; and, unhappily for the

other princes of Romagna, as well as for Catherine and her son, upon a much wider foundation.

Thus from the early spring of 1499, things wore a stormy and troubled appearance at Forlì. Not that it is to be imagined that Catherine for an instant dreamed of submitting to the sentence pronounced against her. Such a course would have been unheard of in her day. Holy Father might say what he pleased, hail bulls, and do his worst. The Countess of Forlì would hold her son's sceptre for him, as long as the walls of the city and fortress would hold together!

And besides, this old debauchee of a Pope might die any fine morning. He was well stricken in years, and his life said to be none of the best. And then there would be a fresh shuffle of the cards, and a new deal, with who knows what new fortunes, and Borgias nowhere in the race.

Meantime it was very desirable to keep on good terms of friendship with Florence, and Madama accordingly set about preparing the body of troops desired by the Republic. But symptoms unpleasant enough of Rome's ban having already begun to produce dangerous effects were not slow to manifest themselves.

Two deputies were appointed for each ward of the city to make out lists of all the men capable of bearing arms; and the roll having been duly sent in to the castle, all those named in it were ordered to present themselves in the space in front of the citadel at a given hour, to receive, as they were bound to do, their sovereign's orders.* Catherine and her officers were there to receive their brave lieges. But time came—time went—and not a man appeared. The lady was

* Burriel, p. 673.

angered to a degree she rarely suffered herself to appear; and issued orders that officers should that night go round to every house in Forlì at midnight, when the inmates were sure to be found there, and warn each enrolled man severally, that if he did not appear at the appointed hour on the morrow, he should be dangling from a gallows before the next nightfall. But the result of this vigorous measure by no means tended to mend matters. For the threatened men, almost to a man, used the remaining hours of that night to escape from the city; a contingency against which no provision had been made; as it had never entered into the head of Catherine or her counsellors that the daring disaffection of her subjects could proceed to such lengths. The anger of the baffled sovereign may be imagined. But it was still worse to find, from the unusually loud mutterings of the citizens, that public opinion was in favour of the deserters. One said that citizens unaccustomed to soldiership could be of no use in war; another, that it was hard for men with families to be called on to abandon them for Madama's affairs, and merely because she willed it; while others, more daringly meddling with matters of state policy, maintained, that it was against all reason that Forlì should unite herself with Florence, which could be of no use to her, against the Venetians, with whom was the principal commerce of the city.

The incident was assuredly an ominous one. But Catherine was not to be easily frightened or diverted from her intent; and for this time the required levies were obtained from the apparently more docile and more long-suffering peasants of the territory.

A little later in July of this year 1499, we find the Florentines again negotiating with Catherine, and no

less a man than Niccolò Macchiavelli was the agent sent to her by the Republic. The written instructions received by him from the Signory on the occasion of this embassy, and seven letters from him to the Gonfalonière and council, giving an account of his proceedings, have been printed from the originals preserved in the Archives at Florence.*

The business in hand was the signing of a new engagement for another year with the Count Ottaviano, as general in the army of the Republic. The young count was now just twenty years old. But he does not appear to have taken any part in the matter, leaving his mother to make the best bargain for his services that she could. But Florence wanted to reduce his pay from the twelve thousand ducats it had been fixed at the previous year, to ten thousand; and this was the point which Macchiavelli was urged to use all his statecraft and subtilty in gaining. The arguments used, the considerations put forward, and the weighing of the probabilities as to the opposite party yielding or holding out, are very amusingly similar in tone and turn of mind, to those of any Florentine driving a hard bargain at the present day; and show us the learned and profound Secretary of the Republic almost a match for any chafferer of the Mercato nuovo.

He alleges the exhausted condition of the Florentine treasury for the moment; enlarges much on the advantages to be drawn from the friendship of Florence, and speaks largely of her well-known gratitude to her supporters. At the same time he points out, that the present proposition of the Republic is solely motived by its wish to continue a connexion honourable to both

* Opere di Macchiavelli. Italia. 1813, vol. vi. p. 7.

parties, as, for the present, it has absolutely no need of the noble Count's services.

But the astute Secretary had met with a match for his diplomacy. Catherine said, that she had ever found the Florentines, as now, abounding in most satisfactory assurances and courteous words, but that their acts matched badly with them. She thought she merited better treatment at their hands, having exposed her State to the inroads of the Venetians by her faithful adherence to them. She wished nothing but to continue on the good and friendly terms they had hitherto been on. And as for this matter of the reduction of the salary, it pained her, because it was seeming to cast a slight upon her son to diminish his appointments, while those of other generals were maintained by the Republic at the old amount. Besides, there was the Duke of Milan, her relative, now offering to engage Ottaviano at twelve thousand ducats: and what excuse could she make to him, if she refused his offer, and accepted a worse one from Florence? Then again, the stipend due for last year had not been paid yet; and really she wished to see that settled before entering on new engagements.

Macchiavelli writes home, that he strove hard to content her with good words, saying everything he could think of to cajole her; but was forced to come away convinced, he says, that "words and reasoning will not avail much to satisfy her, unless some partial performance be added to them." As to this offer from the Duke of Milan, he fears there may be some grounds of apprehension concerning it, as Messer Giovanni Casale, the Duke's envoy, had been at Forlì for the last two months, and evidently had much influence there.

It is amusing, knowing as we do right well, what was in the minds of either party, to read the abundance of complimentary speeches, duly detailed by the careful secretary, in which all these bargainings were carefully wrapped up.

At last Macchiavelli writes home to his masters to the effect, that he thinks they must pay off the old score, and increase their present offer to twelve thousand ducats. And the treaty was eventually signed for that amount.

There are signs however in these letters of Macchiavelli, that the Florentine coffers were really running low. The envoy had been instructed to ask for a body of 500 troops; and writes back, that they may be had; and that Catherine will take all care to send picked men, well armed, and faithful;—*but* that the cash must be sent beforehand, five hundred ducats at the least, before a man could march. If the above sum were sent, they might reckon on having the five hundred men before Pisa in fifteen days; but the ready cash was an absolute *sine-quâ-non*. And the result of this communication from the envoy was, that the Signory suffered the negociation quietly to drop.

Then come orders to purchase sundry war-stores and ammunitions; to which the reply is, that Catherine had neither powder nor balls to spare, being but badly provided for her own exigences. To show however her wish to do everything in her power for the Republic, Madama had consented to let the Signory have the half of a parcel of twenty thousand pounds of nitre, which she had succeeded in purchasing at Pesaro.

And so on the 25th of July Macchiavelli left Forlì, having been obliged to yield every point in dispute to our business-like heroine.

But the evil days were at hand. Louis XII., who had succeeded to Charles VIII., entered into a league with the Venetians and Pope Alexander, with the understanding that the king should be assisted in seizing the Duchy of Milan, while Cesare Borgia was to be helped to possess himself of the various small principalities of Romagna, specially those of Imola and Forlì. Early in November, Borgia with a numerous army, chiefly French, appeared before Imola. Ottaviano hurried thither immediately, and having done what he could to persuade the little city to make a vigorous defence, returned to the more important care of preparing Forlì to stand a siege.

Imola surrendered at the first summons of Borgia. But not so did Dionigi Naldi the *Castellano* of the fortress. To every threat of the enemy he replied, that he was determined to do his duty to the last; and in fact only yielded when the fortress had been battered into ruins around him.

Meanwhile Madama and her son were taking every means to defend Forlì. The country was laid waste around, and everything portable brought into the city. The fortifications were repaired, Ottaviano himself labouring as a porter to encourage his subjects, and Madama herself personally superintending the work. But the conduct of Imola made Catherine feel, that unless the Forlivesi really intended to stand by her and defend their city, it would be much wiser to employ all her efforts in preparing for an obstinate resistance in the fortress, and leave the town to itself. She therefore determined to call a general council of the citizens, and invite every one to speak his opinion freely on the measures to be adopted, for raising the necessary supplies. Her own plans and intentions were first fully explained,

and then any who had objections to make were desired to speak. Whereupon many rose to put forward different views, to whom the superior advantages of the lady's plans were duly pointed out. But it so happened, that the objectors were still unconvinced. Whereupon Madama became so angered, that "she regarded this circumstance as an abuse of her kindness; and being resolved to tolerate such opposition no further, caused a gallows to be forthwith raised on the piazza, and a rack to be erected by the side of it; wishing thus to let it be understood to the terror of all, that, though her goodness was great, it had its limits." *

Yet these conciliatory measures do not seem to have had all the effect that could have been desired on the minds of the citizens. For notwithstanding the persuasive nature of the arguments mentioned above, it seems, that the result of one or two other councils of her lieges finally convinced Catherine that no hope was to be placed in the fidelity of the city; and that she had nothing to look to but the strength of the fortress, and her own energy in defending it.

In these nearly desperate circumstances the still undaunted Countess determined on the 11th of December to send her son away into Tuscany, that *his* safety at least might in case of the worst be secured, while she remained to face the storm. The division between the town and the citadel now became complete. The citizens made no longer any secret of their intentions to open their gates to Borgia, and tender him their allegiance; while all those who were personal adherents of the Riarii, or who determined still to link their fortunes with that of Madama and her sons retreated into the fortress.

* Burriel, p. 725.

The citizens had thus abandoned and defied in her danger and extremity the high-handed and haughty mistress, before whom they had so often trembled; and were doubtless congratulating themselves in having been permitted so easily to change their allegiance from a sinking house to one in the ascendant, when they were suddenly reminded that they were not yet well "off with the old love," by the opening of the fortress guns on the city. The astonishment was great, that Catherine, who must well know that she would shortly have need of every arm and every ounce of powder she could muster, should thus commence a contest with a second enemy, as if the Borgia were not enough. But the proud Dame held that all those who were not for her, were against her; and could ill brook the disobedience and desertion of her vassals. But this cannonading her own city, was, under any provocation, an act but poorly excusable by the motives set forth in its defence by Burriel;—that the enemy might not suppose that she was an acquiescing party in the abandonment of the city, or that she was alarmed or discouraged by it.

On the other hand it must not be imagined that the injury inflicted on the citizens by such a measure was in any way comparable to that which we naturally picture to ourselves, as the result of firing on a city from the walls of a fortress. The proportion between the means of offence and defence at the disposal of European combatants, has for the last four hundred years been continually changing in favour of the former. So that the mischief done in a given time by any military operations is infinitely greater now than was the case when Catherine battered Forlì.

On the 19th of December Cesare Borgia made his

triumphal entry into Forlì, with all those theatrical circumstances of personal pomp and bravery which in the conceptions of those peacock-like southern idiosyncracies form so large and essential portion of the idea of "greatness." The troops and their officers having filed into the city before him, the great man,—most wicked, base, and incapable of any great or noble thought of all men there;—the great man, most revered, admired, and obeyed of all men there, advanced stately in full armour on a white horse, with an heraldically embroidered silk tunic over his armour, a tall white plume nodding above his helmet, and in his hand a long green lance, the point of which rested on the toe of his boot.

And these well selected properties answered their purpose so perfectly, that no man in the vast concourse there guessed, that Cesare Borgia was not a great man, even when to the considerable discomfiture of all the scenic arrangements a sudden torrent of rain threatened to wash out all visible distinction between his Highness and ordinary mortals. The magistrates and deputation of nobles, who were receiving him at the gate, turned and fled in scamping disorder, each man to the nearest shelter.* Borgia hastily rode round the piazza in performance of the recognised symbol of taking possession of the city, and then hurried off to the lodging prepared for him. But the storm was productive of far more serious evil to the unfortunate townsfolk. For all the officers, having hurried away to their various quarters, no one remained to superintend the billeting of the soldiers with any regularity. And the consequence was, that they rushed pell-mell through the city, forcing

* Burriel, p. 760.

their way into the houses, and finding lodging for themselves according to their own discretion.

The results of this irruption, and of the license which followed it, were almost equivalent to the sack of the city. The town became a perfect hell, writes one chronicler.* The shops were gutted. The *Palazzo Pubblico* was almost entirely devastated. The great council hall was turned into a tavern, and all the seats burned. The guard-room and the offices of the customs were made a slaughter-house; and the utmost confusion and disorder prevailed everywhere. "In the houses," writes Burriel, "neither could any business be carried on, nor could their inmates even live there, as the soldiers entered in parties, made themselves masters of everything, and ill-treated the owners;—not to mention the worse lot of widows, and of those who had daughters, and could find no place of safety for them."

The citizens began to find that things could hardly have been worse with them had they rallied round their courageous liege lady, and bravely defended their walls.

Borgia twice had parley with Madama at his request; and used every argument to induce her to give up the fortress, wholly in vain. Towards the end of December the attack was commenced; and for about a week continued without much result. And then, at the beginning of the new year and century, a truce was agreed on for a few days. The French during this time gave themselves up to festivities and amusements, which seem not a little to have astonished the more civilised Italians. For instance, writes one of the

* Bernardi, p. 410.

historians, D'Aubigny and Galvani, two of Borgia's generals, lodging in the house of Messer Giovanni Monsignani determined on inviting a party of their brother officers. A sufficiently ample banqueting hall was provided by boarding up the arches of the "loggia" or open arcade so common in Italian domestic architecture; and provision for a feast intended to last two entire days was obtained at small cost by a razzia upon the peasants. When the guests arrived, they were followed, we are assured, by a mob of all sorts of people, who, while the convives sat at table, stood around eating and drinking all they could lay their hands on. And when the repast was finished, two men, "according to their barbarous, and truly too outrageous custom," sprung on the table, and dancing on it, smashed and destroyed all the plates and other utensils thereon, and threw the wreck with all the remnant of the eatables to the ground. "Then came in an exceedingly long procession of men and women," (of whom a considerable number, it should seem, accompanied the camp;) "driving before them a man on horseback in a long gown and cap like a mitre on his head. This procession stood around the tables drinking and making merry, with much laughter. Then all went out arm in arm, parading the streets, and roaring out their tasteless disagreeable songs to the exceeding wonder of the Forlivesi." * We can easily believe it;—easily imagine too the scene produced by the Lord of Misrule, who may probably be recognised in the gentleman with the long gown and mitre, and his roystering crew of roaring swash-bucklers startling the echoes from the tall stone walls of the old Italian town, amid the cautious peeping of the scared and scanda-

* Burriel, p. 783.

lised burghers, quite at a loss to understand the meaning and intention of this strange manifestation of the barbarians.

On the 10th of January, 1500, the attack on the fortress was renewed, and by mid-day on the 12th, the breach was nearly practicable. Borgia left the attack, we are told, at that hour, to go to dinner! and while at table, made a bet of thirty ducats with some of his officers, that he would have Catherine in his hands within three days. Returning to the walls, he found that fortune had prepared for him a more rapid victory than he had hoped for. Either by treachery, as the Forlì historians, of course, maintain, or by the efforts of the enemy, a fire had broken out in the fort, which paralysed the garrison; and driving them from their defences, caused the principal part of the fortifications to fall into the hands of the enemy.

The case was now clearly hopeless; but Catherine retiring into the principal tower, still stood at bay. At the same time another tower, which had served as the magazine, and into which a large number of the enemy had penetrated, was fired by some of Catherine's people; and all those within it met with a fearful death. This act of useless cruelty so exasperated the soldiers of Borgia, that a general massacre of the garrison was commenced. At this juncture, Borgia once again demanded to parley with the Countess, who accordingly presented herself at a window of her tower. They spoke together at length, while he strove to persuade her of the uselessness of prolonging the struggle. But while she still stood at the window speaking with him, a French soldier, who had found some means of entrance into the tower, stepped up behind her, and made her prisoner in the name of his captain.

All this took place on the afternoon of the 12th of January. Catherine was that night kept prisoner in the citadel, where Borgia and the French general visited her, and talked with her, it is recorded, for more than an hour;—an hour sufficiently bitter, one may suppose, to that haughty dame, who had to listen to the courtesies of her captors, while the sounds of falling masonry, and exploding mines, the shouts of the pursuers, and the cries of the conquered as they fell, ever and anon came through the thick walls, and gave clear evidence of the work of destruction which was in progress.

The Forlì historians recount at much length the cruelties and insults which their forefathers had to suffer from the victorious barbarian army during several days,—the insatiable rapacity of all classes of the soldiers, the wanton destruction of that which could not be appropriated, and the general devastation of the city. But all this is unhappily too common, and too well known a story, to need repeating here.

History has for centuries been preaching to mankind from her great stock text, on war and its consequences;—and at last not so wholly in vain, as in the good old time. But if so terrible an amount of evil be inseparable from the most glorious war,—and the valorous assertion of right, against wrong-doing might is, and must ever be, glorious,—what shall be said of slaughter-matches, in which no high idea or noble feeling had any, the least share; by which the basest passions are intensified, the lowest motives alone brought into action, with only this distinction, that the higher the social rank of the “noble soldier,” the baser were the objects he proposed to himself as the prizes of the fight!

Towards the end of January, Borgia left Forlì, wholly submitted to his authority, and led away his noble captive to Rome. Catherine, clothed, it is recorded, in a black satin dress, made the journey on horseback, riding between her conqueror and one of the French generals. She arrived in Rome on the 26th of February, 1500. And, as she once again entered that Porta del Popolo, the dethroned widow can hardly have failed to contrast the circumstances of her return with those of her first arrival in the Eternal City.

CHAPTER X.

Catherine arrives in Rome;—is accused of attempting to poison the Pope;—is imprisoned in St. Angelo;—is liberated;—and goes to Florence.—Her cloister life with the Murate nuns.—Her collection of wonderful secrets.—Making allowances.—Catherine's death.

PASSING along the same line of streets which she had traversed twenty-three years before as the bride of the then wealthiest and most powerful man in Rome,—as much an object of curiosity now as then to the sight-loving populace, eager to stare at the celebrated prisoner of the now wealthiest and most powerful man in Rome, as then to welcome the great man's bride,—Catherine was led by her captor to the Vatican. Up the well-known stair, and through the familiar chambers, lined, when last she passed across them, with a crowd of bending courtiers, anxious to catch a word or glance from the powerful favourite, who held all Apostolic graces in her hand, she passed on to the presence of the Pontiff.

Alexander received her courteously; assigned an apartment in the Belvidere of the Vatican as her prison, and assured her, that no care should be wanting to make her residence there as little irksome as was consistent with the precautions necessary to secure her safe custody.

No doubt the haughty lady replied to the Sovereign Pontiff, who, when last they had met, had been too

happy in being honoured with her friendship, with equal courtesy. But the feelings in the breast of either interlocutor, which were thus decorously veiled, may be easily estimated.

And it was not long before the genuine hatred pierced through the flimsy sham of courtly politeness. In the month of June—that is, four months after her arrival in Rome—an accusation was brought against Catherine of having attempted to destroy the Pope by poison. The story put forward was one strangely characteristic of medieval modes of thinking and acting.* It was asserted that when Catherine heard in the spring of 1499, that the Pope had judicially declared her deposed from her sovereignty, she had at once determined on compassing his death. With this view, she had caused certain letters, written by her to the Pontiff, to be placed inside the clothing, on the breast of one dying of the plague, then prevalent in Forlì. These letters, having thus been rendered deadly to whoso should touch them, were consigned to a certain confidential servant of the Countess, named Battista, with orders to proceed to Rome, and deliver the papers into no hand save that of Alexander himself. This man, the accusation went on to say, met in Rome one Cristoforo Balatrone, a former servant of the Riarii, then in disgrace with his mistress; and confided to him the real object of the mission intrusted to him, promising him restoration to Catherine's favour, if he would assist in the execution of it.

The accusation, therefore, it will be observed, supposed that Catherine did not merely avail herself of

* Burriel, p. 817.

this servant's aid, as a courier to carry the letters and deliver them as ordered, which would have been all that was needful, but unnecessarily, as it would seem, confided to him the fatal secret of her intentions.

Cristoforo, it was said, instead of acquiescing in Battista's proposal, persuaded the latter to reveal the whole to the Pontiff. For that purpose they forthwith proceeded to the Vatican. It was late in the evening, and they were bidden by one Tommaso Carpi, the Pope's chamberlain, and who was also, as it happened, a Forlì man, to return on the morrow if they wished an audience. In the mean time Cristoforo, not being able to keep so great a secret for so many hours, related the whole matter to his brother, a private in the Papal guards. The soldier immediately reported the story to his captain; and he, thinking promptitude necessary in such a case, forthwith arrested both Cristoforo and Battista, and made the Pope acquainted with all the circumstances on the following morning. Alexander knowing, it was said (although at that period he could have known nothing of the sort, but could only have hoped it), that Catherine would shortly be brought to Rome, ordered that these men should be kept in secret confinement till the arrival of the Countess.

According to this story, therefore, Alexander was aware of Catherine's murderous intentions at the time of that courteous reception we read of. But then, and for four months afterwards, no such accusation was heard of. At the end of that time Catherine was submitted to the humiliation of being confronted with the two men who testified to this accusation, before Alexander himself. To our ideas it would seem that there must have been various means of proving or disproving the

facts in question. The letters might have been produced, and means of ascertaining their contagiousness devised. But juridical and medical science were in far too barbarous a state, and still more fatally the sentiment of fairness and appreciation of the desirableness of truth, far too much deadened for any such mode of proceeding to have been thought of. The witnesses maintained their story by their assertion; Catherine utterly denied that there was any truth in any part of it; and the whole scope of the examination seems to have been to see which party would most obstinately adhere to their assertion.

In an ordinary case the obstinacy would quickly have been more satisfactorily tested by placing the accused on the rack. But even a Pope, and that Pope Alexander VI., would hardly venture to apply the torture to Catherine Sforza. The examination, therefore appears to have resulted in a battledore-and-shuttlecock iteration of "You did," and "I did not," so much to the advantage of the lady, that one* of her biographers writes triumphantly of her, that "Although confronted with those who audaciously accused her of having sent them to Rome for that purpose, she, with a virile and intrepid mind, conquered by her obstinate constancy the wicked will of Alexander."

This wicked will was not, however, so completely vanquished as to prevent the accused, though not convicted, Countess from being immediately transferred from the Belvidere to the castle of St. Angelo; to the prisons of which ill-omened fortress she was consigned on the 26th of June.

And all the probabilities of the case seem to indicate

* Fabio Oliva.

that the accusation was trumped up merely to justify this change in the Countess' place of confinement. Catherine, while she lived, was likely to be ever as tormenting a thorn in the side of Cæsare Borgia, as the ousted Ordelaffi pretenders had been in hers, even during the Pontiff's life. And after that, when the new sovereign of Romagna would have to maintain himself in his position unaided by Apostolic influence, she would be a far more dangerous enemy. Yet the rank and connections of Catherine, and her own reputation and character and standing among the princes of Italy were such, that it was requisite to proceed warily in any attempt to get rid of her. A good pretext was necessary to justify even the rigour of imprisoning her in St. Angelo. But that step taken, the rest would not be so difficult. Those once hidden in the dreadful vaults of that huge mass of old Roman masonry, were too completely cut off from all communication with the outer world, for there to be any possibility of marking their passage from the living tomb, to the veritable grave within its walls. Papal dungeons reveal no secrets; and there can be little doubt that, but for the interposition of an arm more powerful than that of the Pontiff, Catherine would never have recrossed that threshold passed by so many unreturning feet.

As to the real guilt of our heroine in this matter, it must be admitted that the presumption in her favour rests more on the improbability of the means said to have been selected by her, and on the incredibility of Alexander's having suppressed all mention of the crime for four months, rather than on any conviction that she would have been incapable of any such atrocity. That Catherine would without hesitation or scruple take

human life—nay, many human lives—on the provocation of wrong much lighter than that received by her from the Pontiff, is clear enough ; but it is true, that many, most probably, of her contemporaries, who would have never thought twice of sending burgher or peasant to the rack or gallows in a fit of passing passion, would have shrunk from poisoning a Pope. The atrocity of the deed, in the estimation of the contemporary writers, is derived from the sacred character and high rank of its object. And these are considerations which, it may be fairly supposed from what we have seen of Catherine, would be likely to influence her less than they might have done others. It is difficult to believe that Popes were very sacred personages in her eyes. She had been too much behind the scenes to be much under the influence of stage illusion. And, in a word, it will be felt, if the foregoing pages have at all succeeded in picturing this masterful woman to the reader as she appears to the writer, that she was not likely to have turned away from any means that presented themselves to her of removing out of her path any individual, be he who he might, whose existence seemed fatal to the objects for which she had lived and struggled.

Nevertheless, for the reasons above stated, it seems more probable that the accusation in question was trumped up for the sake of furnishing an opportunity to the Pope of taking her life, which was almost as dangerous to his aims, as his life was to her. And had it not been for the powerful interference of the French king, doubtless Catherine would never have come out alive from the dungeons of St. Angelo. One of the historians * simply says that she owed her life

* Vecchiazani, vol. ii. p. 203.

to the protection of France. Things were not in a position to render it possible that Alexander should act in defiance of the remonstrances of Louis XII.; and Catherine was liberated on the 30th of June, 1501.

Having remained at Rome a few days among her relatives and connections of the house of Riario, she left it for the last time on the 27th of July, and went to Florence. All her children by her three husbands had already found an asylum there; where, in consideration of her third marriage, rights of citizenship had, by an instrument bearing date the 27th of July, 1498, been conferred on all of them.

It is not without a certain feeling of surprise that one remembers that Catherine, after a career so full of incident, comprising three married lives and three widowhoods, was now only thirty-nine years of age. The active and useful portion of many an existence begins at as late a period. But Catherine seems to have felt that she had lived her life, and that the active portion of her career was over. Almost immediately on arriving in Florence, she selected the convent of the Murate as the place of her retirement; and she never afterwards quitted it.

More than one change in the political world occurred during the years she passed there, which seemed calculated to make a place for her once again upon the great scene of Europe, and perhaps to open a path for her return to sovereign place and power. Alexander VI. died in 1503; and, after a few months' occupation of the Papal throne by Pius III., Giuliano della Rovere, first cousin of Girolamo Riario, was elected and became Pope under the name of Julius II. It is true that this warrior Pope did not subsequently appear disposed to lend any helping hand to his Riari

cousins for the recovery of their dominions; but the elevation of a cousin to the chair of St. Peter might well call forth from the cloister one who had any wish remaining to play a part in the world.

But Catherine remained quiet in the monotonous repose of her cell in the Via Ghibellina, and did not disturb herself to make even the smallest attempt at obtaining the favour of the new Pontiff. It must be concluded that she had in truth abandoned the world, with an earnestness of purpose more durable than is usually the case with such votaries of seclusion.

Yet few can have ever experienced a more violent change than that suffered by this strong-willed woman in passing from a life so filled with movement, excitement, activity, danger, pains, pleasures, and vicissitudes, to the dead tranquillity of a secure cloister cell. Her priest biographer* hints that the macerations, fasts, and austerities practised by her during her residence at the Murate, were such as in all probability to have shortened her life. Having followed with infinite complacency the worldly triumphs and grandeurs of his heroine, as long as devoutly worshipped Mammon had rewards to shower on his votary, the greedy biographer seeks to finish off his picture by adding a little halo of sanctity, and thus claims double honours for his client.

But there is reason to think that these severe penances are wholly the creatures of the writer's priestly invention. The Murate, at the period of Catherine's retirement there, was not the place any penitent would have selected for the leading of an austere life. The convent was inhabited exclusively by

* Burriel, p. 823.

noble ladies, and some picture of the life led there by them, has been given by the present writer in speaking of the residence there of another Catherine* a few years afterwards. Her childhood was passed within the same cloister-wall that had sheltered the decline of that namesake whose character presented so many striking points of similarity to her own.

It is not likely that the Murate convent was the scene of any severe austerities. But if no spiritual excitement of this sort supplied for Catherine the place of that which she had lost, the hours of the long day, however diversified by matins, lauds, complines, and vesper amusements, must surely have passed heavily.

A very curious MS. volume,† copied from one in Catherine's own handwriting, may perhaps indicate the disposal of some of those weary hours. It consists of more than five hundred receipts and experiments in medicine, chemistry, cosmetics, perfumery, alchemy, &c. The practice of forming and preserving such collections seems to have been a common one among the ladies of that time; and various similar volumes may be met with. In a short preface, the copier of Catherine's manuscript, a certain Messer Lucantonio Cuppani, declares that he has tested many of the receipts and found the results perfectly satisfactory, and that he doubts not that the rest are equally trustworthy, seeing that so great a woman had recorded them; wherefore he has made the present copy, lest the knowledge of such wonderful secrets might be lost.

Many of these valuable secrets are of a nature to be only too really valuable in the hands of a sove-

* *Girlhood of Cat. de' Medici*, cap. 10.

† Note 13.

reign possessing a mint of her own. The papal bull authorising the coining of money at Forlì contains a special provision for the goodness of the metal. But the following entries, in the royal-minded Catherine's own hand, suggest strong doubts of the condition having been duly observed :—

“ To convert pewter into silver of the finest quality and of standard alloy.”

“ For giving to bars of brass a fine golden colour.”

Several receipts, “ For multiplying silver.”

More curious and suspicious still, is the possession of a method by which “ to give weight to a crown or ducat of gold, *without hurting the conscience—senza carico di coscienza* ” !

A great number refer to subjects, which we must suppose to have been more interesting to Catherine at an earlier period of her life, than when living among “ the wall'd-up Nuns.” As, for instance, a receipt “ to drive away pallor from the face, and give it a colour.” For this purpose, roots of myrrh must be shred into good generous wine ; then “ drink sufficiently of that, and it will give you a carnation of the most beautiful.” This is probably one of the receipts tried, and found to answer by Messer Lucantonio.

Then we have a water to preserve the skin against blotches ; another to make the teeth white ; and a third to make the gums red ; and very many others for the beautification of almost every part of the person.

As a specimen of the medical “ secrets,” of which a great number are treasured up in this curious volume, the following may be cited : For infirm lungs, an ointment is to be made of the blood of a hen, a duck, a pig, a goose, mixed with fresh butter and white wax. And this is to be applied to the chest on a fox's skin.

In which the fox-skin holds a place analogous to that of the six pounds of beef in the well-known recipe for making stone soup.

More problematical is a receipt for "a drink to make splintered bones come out of the wound of themselves."

There are many examples of sick-room practice, based on curious combinations of medical with theological treatment; as in the following method for healing sabre wounds: "Take three pieces of an old shirt, steeped in holy water, and bind them on the wound in the form of a cross. The wound must have been carefully washed; and the patient must have no offensive arms about him. He must say three *paters* and three *aves* off; if he cannot, some one must say them for him. For the success of this cure, it is necessary that both the wounded man and the operator be in a state of bodily purity."

The following must probably be one of those which good Lucantonio did not make trial of, but took on trust undoubtingly, from his faith in the noble author's "greatness:—" "To make a toad cast his stone. Take a toad of those which have a red head. Place him in a cage, and put the cage upon a piece of scarlet cloth; and early in the morning, set it in the ray of the rising sun. The toad will look fixedly at the sun; and you must let him remain there for three hours. And at the end of that time he will cast forth a stone which has three virtues: 1st, It is specific against poison; 2nd, It is good to staunch blood; 3rd, When a horse is in pain, grate some of the stone, and make him drink it."

There are among these valuable secrets, waters "to make iron hard;" "to make it as brittle as

glass ;” “to dissolve pearls ;” to dissolve all metals ;” &c., &c.

There are no less than thirteen different specifics against witchcraft.

Then, if you would know whether a sick person will recover, you must “clean the face of the sick with warm paste, and then give the paste to a dog. If the dog should eat the paste, the sick man will recover ; if not, he will die.”

Lastly, there are a great number of a kind that, less than any of the others, should have been of any interest to the recluse of the Murate ; such as love philtres, specifics against sterility and other kindred inconveniences. Several are for purposes set forth by the noble lady with the utmost cynical directness of terms, but which cannot, under any veil of phrase, be even indicated here. And some instructions there are, which would place any modern English man or woman acting on them, in a very disagreeable position in the dock of the Old Bailey ; but which are here, by some theological sharp practice, so cleverly and piously managed, as to attain their object, “*senza carico di coscienza.*”

It would seem, too, that, startling as is the cynicism of some of the language which Messer Lucantonio has not scrupled to copy in his best text-hand, some of the lady’s secrets must have been of a yet more abominable description. For passages in cipher frequently occur in a context, which indicates that such has been the reason for so veiling them.

In short, there is to be found in the pages of this strangely curious and tell-tale volume, abundant evidence that the woman who could collect, transcribe, and find an interest in preserving such “secrets,” as

many of those here, must, according to English nineteenth-century codes and feelings, have been lost to every sense of decency, and deplorably ignorant of the laws, and even of the true nature of morality. But there is no reason to think that Catherine fell in these respects at all lower than the general level of her age and country. There is ample proof, on the contrary, that in these, as in all other matters, Catherine was essentially a woman of her time—in no respect in advance of her time, or behind it; but furnishing a full and fair expression and type of her age and class, as is ever the case with vigorous, bustling, strong, practical natures of her stamp. The men, who are before their time, whose domain is the future, to their utter exclusion from all dominion over the present, are of another sort.

The writers and readers of biographies are, as it seems to the author of the present, too much wont to feel themselves called upon to express, or at least to form a judgment, as to the amount of moral approbation or condemnation to be awarded to the object of their examination. They continually suffer their thoughts to be drawn from the legitimate and useful study of their subject, by a constant consideration of the judgment to be passed on such or such individual soul by the one all-seeing Judge, alone competent to solve any such question. They talk of "making allowance," as the phrase goes; and spend much weighing on the quantum of such allowance admissible. Vain speculation surely, and quite beside the purpose! Not on the ground of "charitable construction" being due, and of "judging not," &c. (for lack of charity towards a fellow-creature, or other evil passion whatever, can hardly find place in our thoughts of one, whose exit

from our scene was four centuries ago), but because such questions are insoluble, and if they were soluble, would be unprofitable. For we are not in the position of the bedside physician, whose duty is to alleviate the pangs of the sufferer, and to struggle against the individual malady by individual appliances. We are in the place of the *post-mortem* anatomist, who, without reference to the sufferings of the deceased, has only to ascertain that a certain amount of mischief to the machine he is examining, resulted from such and such circumstances. And this information is useful only on account of his persuasion that other similar machines will be in like circumstances similarly affected.

We have no need, therefore, of any of that feeling of the moral pulse, which might be useful for the priest or philosopher, who would "minister to a mind diseased." We have only to ascertain that a certain amount of deviation from moral health existed under such and such circumstances. And this, in as much as the laws which govern our ethical constitution are as immutable as those which rule the physical world, is an investigation of infinite and eternal interest. Under the influence of such and such social constitutions, spiritual teachings, and modes of living, this case of moral disease was generated. Here is a practically useful fact. And if it should appear that, under those same influences this malady was epidemic, the interest of the case assumes larger proportions.

Altogether dismissing from our minds, therefore, all considerations of our poor defunct subject's blameableness, and deservings, and all weighing of allowances wholly imponderable in any scales of ours, let us heedfully observe and reflect on the proved facts of the case.

This poor Catherine, born, as our autopsy shows, with so strong, vigorous, and large a nature, came to be savagely reckless of human life, and blood-thirsty in her vengeance; came to be so grossly material in her mode of regarding that part of our nature, which, duly spiritualised, contributes much to our preparation for eternity, but which, unspiritualised, most draws us to the level of the lower animals, as to be capable of *writing* such things as have been alluded to; came lastly to consider all distinction between right and wrong, and God's eternal laws to be of the nature of an Act of Parliament carelessly drawn, through which, by sharp-witted dexterity, coaches-and-four, as the saying goes, might be driven with impunity; came, we say, to be all this as the result of the teaching offered her by all around her in that great fifteenth century, of the spiritual guidance afforded her by those "ages of faith," and living heart-felt religion, and of the social ideas produced by the medieval relationship between the governors of mankind and their subjects.

Catherine continued to reside with the Murate nuns till the time of her death, in the year 1509, the forty-seventh of her age. She made a long and accurately drawn will, characterised by the justice and good sense with which she partitioned what belonged to her among the children of her three marriages; and was buried in the chapel of the convent; where her monument was still visible, although, strangely enough, its inscribed altar tombstone had at some period been turned face downwards, and where her remains reposed till they were (literally) dispersed a few years ago, on occasion of the old Murate convent being converted into a state prison.

VITTORIA COLONNA.

(1490—1547.)

CHAPTER I.

Changes in the Condition of Italy.—Dark Days.—Circumstances which led to the Invasion of the French.—State of things in Naples.—Fall of the Arragonese Dynasty.—Birth of Vittoria.—The Colonna—Marino.—Vittoria's Betrothal.—The Duchess di Francavilla.—Literary Culture at Naples.—Education of Vittoria in Ischia.

A NUMBER of years less than sufficient for the passing away of one generation elapsed between the birth of Catherine Sforza and that of Vittoria Colonna. The latter was celebrating her marriage, with life all decked in its gayest hues, and lighted with its brightest sunshine spread out before her, in the same year in which the stout-hearted old châtelaine, wearied and world-sick was dying out of sight in a cloister. But the passage of these few years had brought about events that furnished forth a changed scene for the younger lady to play her part on. The second dark age of Italy, according to the historians, was about to commence. The bad times were at hand. The change, we are told by the recorders of it, was all for the worse. And in truth it might well appear so, to all, save those whose faith forbids them to believe in any change for the worse, and whose patience can afford to allow the world-phœnix, as Carlyle says, a

long time,—say, as regards Italy, some four hundred years or so—for burning herself.

The process has not, it must be admitted, been a pleasant one; and those years at the beginning of it were assuredly not pleasant times to those whose lot was cast in them.

The French came down on the country to light up the pyre; the Spaniards followed to make matters worse; Holy Fathers, the only Heaven-given guidance known, went from bad to worse, till badness culminated in a Borgia; new ideas too were bred, like flies in the heat, coming from no man knew where,—leading, assuredly no man then living guessed whither,—and promising in the long run to give more trouble than either French, Spaniards, or Popes,—all tended to make a troublous, yeasty, seething time of our Vittoria's life-span.

The signs of change, which were perplexing monarchs at the period of her entry on the scene, belonged simply to the material order of things; and such broad outline of them, as is necessary to give some idea of the general position of Italy at that day, may be drawn in few words.

Certain more important symptoms of changes in the world of thought and speculation, did not rise to the surface of society till a few years later, and these will have to be spoken of in a subsequent page.

When Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Duke of Milan, was murdered in 1476, his son, Gian Galeazzo, a minor, succeeded to the dukedom. But his uncle Ludovico, known in history as "Ludovico il Moro," under pretence of protecting his nephew, usurped the whole power and property of the crown, which he continued wrongfully to keep in his own hands even after the

majority of his nephew. The latter, however, having married a grand-daughter of Ferdinand of Arragon, King of Naples, her father, Alphonso, heir apparent of that crown, became exceedingly discontented at the state of tutelage in which his son-in-law was thus held. And his remonstrances and threats became so urgent, that "Black Ludovick" perceived that he should be unable to retain his usurped position, unless he could find means of disabling Ferdinand and his son Alphonso from exerting their strength against him. With this view he persuaded Charles VIII. of France to undertake with his aid the conquest of the kingdom of Naples, to which the French monarch asserted a claim, derived from the house of Anjou, which had reigned in Naples, till they were ousted by the house of Arragon. This invitation, which the Italian historians consider the first fountain head of all their calamities, was given in 1492. On the 23rd of August, 1494, Charles left France on his march to Italy, and arrived in Rome on the 31st of December of that year.

On the previous 25th of January, Ferdinand, the old King of Naples, died, and his son, Alphonso, succeeded him. But the new monarch, who during the latter years of his father's life had wielded the whole power of the kingdom, was so much hated by his subjects, that on the news of the French King's approach they rose in rebellion and declared in favour of the invader. Alphonso made no attempt to face the storm, but forthwith abdicated in favour of his son Ferdinand, fled to Sicily, and "set about serving God," as the chroniclers phrase it, in a monastery, where he died a few months later, on the 19th of November, 1495.

Ferdinand II., his son, was not disliked by the nation; and Guicciardini gives it as his opinion, that

if the abdication of his father in his favour had been executed earlier, it might have had the effect of saving the kingdom from falling into the hands of the French monarch. But it was now too late. A large portion of it had already declared itself in favour of the invaders. Ferdinand found the contest hopeless, and early in 1495 retired to Ischia. Charles entered Naples the 21st of February, 1495, and the whole kingdom hastened to accept him as its sovereign.

Meantime, however, Ludovico, Duke of Milan, whose oppressed nephew had died on the 22nd of October, 1494, began to be alarmed at the too complete success of his own policy, and entered into a league with the Venetians, the King of the Romans, and Ferdinand of Castile, against Charles, who seems to have immediately become as much panic stricken at the news of it as Alphonso had been at his approach. The French, moreover, both the monarch and his followers, had lost no time in making themselves so odious to the Neapolitans, that the nation had already repented of having abandoned Ferdinand so readily, and were anxious to get rid of the French and receive him back again. Towards the end of May, 1495, Charles hastily left Naples on his return to France, leaving Gilbert de Montpensier as Viceroy; and on the 7th of July, Ferdinand returned to Naples and was gladly welcomed by the people.

And now, having thus the good-will of his subjects already disgusted with their French rulers, Ferdinand might in all probability have succeeded without any foreign assistance in ridding his country of the remaining French troops left behind him by Charles, and in re-establishing the dynasty of Arragon on the throne of Naples, had he not at the time when things looked

worst with him, on the first coming of Charles, committed the fatal error of asking assistance from Ferdinand the Catholic, of Castile.

Ferdinand the Catholic and the crafty, did not wait to be asked a second time; but instantly despatched to his aid, Consalvo Ernandez d'Aguilar, known thereafter in Neapolitan history as "Il gran Capitano," both on account of his rank as Generalissimo of the Spanish forces, and of his high military merit and successes. Ferdinand of Arragon, with the help of Consalvo and the troops he brought with him, soon succeeded in driving the French out of his kingdom; and appeared to be on the eve of a more prosperous period when a sudden illness put an end to his life in October, 1496. He died without offspring, and was succeeded by his uncle Frederick.

Thus, as the Neapolitan historians remark, Naples had passed under the sway of no less than five monarchs in the space of three years: to wit—

Ferdinand of Arragon, the first, who died 25th of January, 1494.

Alphonso, his son, who abdicated on the 3rd of February, 1495.

Charles of France, crowned at Naples on the 20th of May, 1495, and driven out of the kingdom immediately afterwards.

Ferdinand of Arragon, II., son of Alphonso, who entered Naples in triumph on the 7th of July, 1495, and died in October, 1496.

Frederick of Arragon, his uncle, who succeeded him.

But these so rapid changes had not exhausted the slides of Fortune's magic lanthorn. She had other harlequinade transformations in hand, sufficient to make even Naples tired of change and desirous of

repose. Frederick, the last, and perhaps the best, and best-loved of the Neapolitan sovereigns of the dynasty of Arragon, reigned but to witness the final discomfiture and downfall of his house.

Charles VIII. died in April, 1498; but his successor, Louis XII., was equally anxious to possess himself of the crown of Naples, and more able to carry his views into effect. The principal obstacle to his doing so was the power of Ferdinand of Spain, and the presence of the Spanish troops under Consalvo in Naples. Ferdinand the Catholic, could by no means permit the spoliation of his kinsman and ally, Frederick, who loyally relied on his protection, for the profit of the King of France. Louis knew that it was impossible he should do so. But the Most Christian King thought that the Most Catholic King might very probably find it consistent with kingly honour to take a different view of the case, if it were proposed to him to go shares in the plunder. And the Most Christian King's estimate of royal nature was so just, that the Most Catholic King acceded in the frankest manner to his royal brother's proposal.

Louis accordingly sent an army to invade Naples in the year 1500. The unfortunate Frederick was beguiled the while into thinking that his full trust might be placed on the assistance of Spain. But, when on the 25th of June, 1501, the Borgia Pope, Alexander VII., published a bull graciously dividing his dominions between the two eldest sons of the Church, he perceived at once that his position was hopeless. Resolving, however, not to abandon his kingdom without making an attempt to preserve it, he determined to defend himself in Capua. That city was however taken by the French on the 24th of July, 1501, and Frederick fled

to Ischia ; whence he subsequently retired to France, and died at Tours on the 9th of November, 1504.

Meanwhile, the royal accomplices having duly shared their booty, instantly began to quarrel, as thieves are wont to do, over the division of it. Each in fact had from the first determined eventually to possess himself of the whole ; proving, that if indeed there be honour among thieves, the proverb must not be understood to apply to such as are “ Most Christian,” and “ Most Catholic.”

Naples thus became the battle-field, as well as the prize of the contending parties ; and was torn to pieces in the struggle while waiting to see which invader was to be her master. At length the Spaniard proved the stronger, as he was also the more iniquitous of the two ; and on the 1st of January, 1504, the French finally quitted the kingdom of Naples, leaving it in the entire and peaceful possession of Ferdinand of Spain. Under him, and his successors on the Spanish throne, the unhappy province was governed by a series of viceroys, of whom, says Colletta,* “ one here and there was good, many bad enough, and several execrable,” for a period of 230 years, with results still visible.

Such was the scene on which our heroine had to enter in the year 1490. She was the daughter of Fabrizio, brother of that protonotary Colonna, whose miserable death at the hands of the hereditary enemies of his family, the Orsini, allied with the Riarii, then in power for the nonce during the popedom of Sixtus IV., has been related in the life of Caterina Sforza. Her mother was Agnes of Montefeltre ; and all the biographers and historians tell us, that she was the youngest of six

* Storia di Nap., lib. i. cap. 1.

children born to her parents. The statement is a curious instance of the extreme and very easily detected inaccuracy, which may often be found handed on unchallenged from one generation to another of Italian writers of biography and history.

The Cavaliere Pietro Visconti, the latest Italian, and by far the most complete of Vittoria's biographers, who edited a handsome edition of her works, not published, but printed in 1840 at the expense of the prince-banker, Torlonia, on the occasion of his marriage with the Princess Donna Teresa Colonna, writes thus at page lv of the life prefixed to this votive volume:—"The child (Vittoria) increased and completed the number of children whom Agnes of Montefeltre, daughter of Frederick, Duke of Urbino, had presented to her husband." He adds, in a note, "this Princess had already had five sons, Frederick, Ascanio, Ferdinando, Camillo, Sciarra."

Coppi, in his "Memorie Colonesi," makes no mention* of the last three,—giving as the offspring of Fabrizio and Agnes, only Frederick, Ascanio, and Vittoria. Led by this discrepancy to examine further the accuracy of Visconti's statement, I found that Agnes di Montefeltre was born in 1472; and was, consequently, eighteen years old at the time of Vittoria's birth. It became clear, therefore, that it was exceedingly improbable, not to say impossible, that she should have had five children previously. But I found farther, that Frederick the eldest son, and always hitherto said to have been the eldest child of Agnes, died according to the testimony of his tombstone,† still existing in the

* He speaks, indeed, (p. 236) of Sciarra as a brother of Ascanio; adding, that he was illegitimate.

† Coppi, Mem. Col., p. 269.

Church of Santa Maria di Pallazzola, in the year 1516, being then in his nineteenth year. He was, therefore, born in 1497 or 1498, and must have been seven or eight years younger than Vittoria; who must, it should seem, have been the eldest and not the youngest of her parent's children.

It can scarcely be necessary to tell even the most exclusively English reader, how ancient, how noble, how magnificent, was the princely house of Colonna. They were so noble, that their lawless violence, free-booting habits, private wars, and clan enmities, rendered them a scourge to their country; and for several centuries contributed largely to the mass of anarchy and barbarism, that rendered Rome one of the most insecure places of abode in Europe, and still taints the instincts of its populace with characteristics, which make it one of the least civilisable races of Italy. The Orsini being equally noble, and equally powerful and lawless, the high-bred mastiffs of either princely house for more than 200 years, with short respites of ill-kept truce, never lost an opportunity of flying at each other's throats, to the infinite annoyance and injury of their less noble and more peaceably disposed fellow-citizens.

Though the possessions of the Colonna clan had before been wide-spread and extensive, they received considerable additions during the Papacy of the Colonna pope, Martin V., great uncle of Fabrizio, Vittoria's father, who occupied the Papal chair from 1417 to 1431. At the period of our heroine's birth the family property was immense.

Very many were the fiefs held by the Colonna in the immediate neighbourhood of the city, and especially among the hills to the east and south-east of the Campagna. There several of the strongest positions,

and most delightfully situated towns and castles, belonged to them.

Among the more important of these was Marino, admirably placed among the hills that surround the lovely lake of Albano.

Few excursionists among the storied sites in the environs of Rome make Marino the object of a pilgrimage. The town has a bad name in these days. The Colonna vassals who inhabit it, and still pay to the feudal lord a tribute, recently ruled by the Roman tribunals to be due (a suit having been instituted by the inhabitants with a view of shaking off this old mark of vassalage), are said to be eminent among the inhabitants of the Campagna for violence, lawlessness, and dishonesty. The bitterest hatred, the legacy of old wrong and oppression, is felt by them against their feudal lords; and this sentiment, which, inherited, as it seems to be, from generation to generation, speaks but little in favour of the old feudal rule, does not tend to make the men of Marino good or safe subjects. Many a stranger has, however, probably looked down from the beautifully wooded heights of Castel Gandolfo on the picturesquely gloomy little walled town creeping up the steep side of its hill, and crowned by the ancient seignorial residence it so much detests. And any one of these would be able to assure a recent intensely French biographer of Vittoria, that he is in error in supposing that the town and castle of Marino have so entirely perished and been forgotten, that the site of them even is now unknown!*

On the contrary the old castle has recently been repaired and modernised into a very handsome nine-

* Which is the truly wonderful assertion of M. le Fevre Deumier, in his little volume entitled "Vittoria Colonna;" Paris, 1856, p. 7.

teenth century residence to the no small injury of its outward appearance in a picturesque and historical point of view. The interior still contains unchanged several of the nobly proportioned old halls, which were planned at a time when mighty revels in the rare times of peace, and defence in the more normal condition of clan warfare, were the object held in view by the builder. Many memorials of interest, moreover, pictures, and other records of the old times were brought to Marino from Paliano, when the Colonna family were in the time of the last Pope, most unjustly compelled to sell the latter possession to the Roman government. Paliano, which from its mountain position is extremely strong and easily defended, seemed to the government of the Holy Father to be admirably adapted to that prime want of a Papal despotism, a prison for political offenders. The Colonnas, therefore, were invited to sell it to the state; and on their declining to do so, received an intimation, that the paternal government having determined on possessing it, and having also fixed the price they intended to give for it, no option in the matter could be permitted them. So Marino was enriched by all that was transferable of the ancient memorials that had gathered around the stronger mountain fortress in the course of centuries.

It was at Marino that Vittoria was born, in a rare period of most unusually prolonged peace. Her parents had selected, we are told, from among their numerous castles, that beautiful spot for the enjoyment of the short interval of tranquillity which smiled on their first years* of marriage. A very successful raid, in which Fabrizio and his cousin Prospero Colonna had

* As it would appear they must have been, from the dates given above to show that Vittoria must have been their first child.

harried the fiefs of the Orsini, and driven off a great quantity of cattle,* had been followed by a peace made under the auspices of Innocent VIII. on the 11th August, 1486, which seems absolutely to have lasted till 1494, when we find the two cousins at open war with the new Pope Alexander VI.

Far more important contests, however, were at hand, the progress of which led to the youthful daughter of the house being treated, while yet in her fifth year, as part of the family capital, to be made use of for the advancement of the family interests, and thus fixed the destiny of her life.

When Charles VIII. passed through Rome on his march against Naples at the end of 1494, the Colonna cousins sided with him; placed themselves under his banners, and contributed materially to aid his successful invasion. But on his flight from Naples in 1495, they suddenly changed sides, and took service under Ferdinand II. The fact of this change of party, which to our ideas seems to require so much explanation, probably appeared to their contemporaries a perfectly simple matter; for it is mentioned as such without any word of the motives or causes of it. Perhaps they merely sought to sever themselves from a losing game. Possibly, as we find them rewarded for their adherence to the King of Naples by the grant of a great number of fiefs previously possessed by the Orsini, who were on the other side, they were induced to change their allegiance by the hope of obtaining those possessions, and by the Colonna instinct of enmity to the Orsini race. Ferdinand, however, was naturally anxious to have some better hold over his new friends than that

* Coppi. Mem. Col., p. 228.

furnished by their own oaths of fealty; and with this view caused the infant Vittoria to be betrothed to his subject, Ferdinand d'Avalos, son of Alphonso, Marquis of Pescara, a child of about the same age as the little bride.

Little, as it must appear to our modern notions, as the child's future happiness could have been cared for in the stipulation of a contract entered into from such motives, it so turned out, that nothing could have more effectually secured it. To Vittoria's parents, if any doubts on such a point had presented themselves to their minds, it would doubtless have appeared abundantly sufficient to know, that the rank and position of the affianced bridegroom were such, as to secure their daughter one of the highest places among the nobility of the court of Naples, and the enjoyment of vast and wide-spread possessions. But to Vittoria herself all this would not have been enough. And the earliest and most important advantage arising to her from her betrothal was the bringing her under the influence of that training, which made her such a woman, as could not find her happiness in such matters.

We are told, that henceforth, that is, after the betrothal, she was educated, together with her future husband, in the island of Ischia, under the care of the widowed Duchessa di Francavilla, the young Pescara's elder sister. Costanza d'Avalos, duchessa de Francavilla, appears to have been one of the most remarkable women of her time. When her father Alphonso, Marchesa di Pescara, lost his life by the treason of a black slave on the 7th of September, 1495, leaving Ferdinand his son the heir to his titles and estates, an infant five years old, then quite recently betrothed to Vittoria, the Duchessa di Francavilla assumed the

entire direction and governance of the family. So high was her reputation for prudence, energy, and trust-worthiness in every way, that on the death of her husband, King Ferdinand made her governor and "châtelaine" of Ischia, one of the most important keys of the kingdom. Nor were her gifts and qualities only such as were calculated to fit her for holding such a post. Her contemporary, Caterina Sforza, would have made a "châtelaine" as vigilant, as prudent, as brave and energetic as Costanza. But the Neapolitan lady was something more than this.

Intellectual culture had been held in honour at Naples during the entire period of the Arragonese dynasty. All the princes of that house, with the exception, perhaps, of Alphonso, the father of Ferdinand II., had been lovers of literature and patrons of learning. Of this Ferdinand II., under whose auspices the young Pescara was betrothed to Vittoria, and who chose the Duchessa di Francavilla as his governor in Ischia, it is recorded, that when returning in triumph to his kingdom after the retreat of the French, he rode into Naples with the Marchese de Pescara on his right hand, and the poet Cariteo on his left. Poets and their art especially were welcomed in that literary court; and the tastes and habits of the Neapolitan nobles were at that period probably more tempered by those studies, which humanise the mind and manners, than the chivalry of any other part of Italy.

Among this cultured society Costanza d'Avalos was eminent for culture, and admirably qualified in every respect to make an invaluable protectress and friend to her youthful sister-in-law. The transplantation, indeed, of the infant Colonna from her native feudal castle to the Duchessa di Francavilla's home in Ischia,

was a change so complete and so favourable, that it may be fairly supposed, that without it the young Roman girl would not have grown into the woman she did.

For in truth Marino, little calculated, as it will be supposed, such a stronghold of the ever turbulent Colonna was at any time to afford the means and opportunity for intellectual culture, became shortly after the period of Vittoria's betrothal to the heir of the D'Avalos, wholly unfit to offer her even a safe home. Whether it continued to be the residence of Agnes, while her husband Fabrizio was fighting in Naples, and her daughter was under the care of the Duchessa di Francavilla in Ischia, has not been recorded. But we find that when Fabrizio had deserted the French king, and ranged himself on the side of Ferdinand of Naples, he was fully aware of the danger to which his castles would be exposed at the hands of the French troops as they passed through Rome on their way to or from Naples. To provide against this, he had essayed to place them in safety by consigning them as a deposit in trust to the Sacred College.* But Pope Borgia, deeming, probably, that he might find the means of possessing himself of some of the estates in question, refused to permit this, ordering that they should, instead, be delivered into his keeping. On this being refused, he ordered Marino to be levelled to the ground. And Guicciardini writes,† that the Colonna, having placed garrisons in Amelici and Rocca di Papa, two other of the family strongholds, abandoned all the rest of the possessions in the Roman States. It seems probable, therefore, that Agnes accompanied her

* Coppi. Mem. Col., p. 243.

† Book v. chap. ii.

husband and daughter to Naples. Subsequently the same historian relates,* that Marino was burned by order of Clement VII. in 1526. So that it must be supposed, that the order of Alexander for its utter destruction in 1501 was not wholly carried into execution.

The kingdom and city of Naples was during this time by no means without a large share of the turmoil and warfare that was vexing every part of Italy. Yet whosoever had his lot cast during those years elsewhere than in Rome, was in some degree fortunate. And considering the general state of the Peninsula, and her own social position and connections, Vittoria may be deemed very particularly so to have found a safe retreat, and an admirably governed home on the rock of Ischia. In after life we find her clinging to it with tenacious affection, and dedicating more than one sonnet to the remembrances which made it sacred to her. And though in her widowhood her memory naturally most frequently recurs to the happy years of her married life there, the remote little island had at least as strong a claim upon her affections as the home of her childhood. For to the years there passed under the care of her noble sister-in-law, Costanza d'Avalos, she owed the possibility, that the daughter of a Roman chieftain, who passed his life in harrying others and being harried himself, and in acquiring as a "condottiere" captain the reputation of one of the first soldiers of his day, could become either morally or intellectually the woman Vittoria Colonna became.

* Book xvii. chaps. iii. and iv.

CHAPTER II.



Vittoria's Personal Appearance — First Love — A Noble Soldier of Fortune—Italian Wars of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries—The Colonna Fortunes—Death of Ferdinand II.—The Neapolitans carry Coals to Newcastle—Events in Ischia—Ferdinand of Spain in Naples—Life in Naples in the Sixteenth Century—Marriage of Pescara with Vittoria—Marriage Presents.

FROM the time of her betrothal in 1495 to that of her marriage in 1509, history altogether loses sight of Vittoria. We must suppose her to be quietly and happily growing from infancy to adolescence under the roof of Costanza d'Avalos, the *châtelaine* of Ischia, sharing the studies of her future husband and present playmate, and increasing, as in stature, so in every grace both of mind and body. The young Pescara seems also to have profited by the golden opportunities offered him of becoming something better than a mere *preux chevalier*. A taste for literature, and especially for poesy, was then a ruling fashion among the nobles of the court of Naples. And the young Ferdinand, of whose personal beauty and knightly accomplishments we hear much, manifested also excellent qualities of disposition and intelligence. His biographer Giovio* tells us that his beard was auburn, his nose aquiline, his eyes large and fiery when excited, but mild and gentle at other times. He was,

* Giovio, Vita del Mar. di Pescara, Venice, 1557, p. 14.

however, considered proud, adds Bishop Giovio, on account of his haughty carriage, the little familiarity of his manners, and his grave and brief fashion of speech.

To his playmate Vittoria, the companion of his studies and hours of recreation, this sterner mood was doubtless modified; and with all the good gifts attributed to him, it was natural enough that before the time had come for consummating the infant betrothal, the union planned for political purposes had changed itself into a veritable love-match. The affection seems to have been equal on either side; and Vittoria, if we are to believe the concurrent testimony of nearly all the poets and literateurs of her day, must have been beautiful and fascinating in no ordinary degree. The most authentic portrait* of her is one preserved in the Colonna gallery at Rome, supposed to be a copy by Girolamo Muziano, from an original picture by some artist of higher note. It is a beautiful face of the true Roman type, perfectly regular, of exceeding purity of outline, and perhaps a little heavy about the lower part of the face. But the calm, large, thoughtful eye, and the superbly developed forehead, secure it from any approach towards an expression of sensualism. The fulness of the lip is only sufficient to indicate that sensitiveness to, and appreciation of beauty, which constitutes an essential element in the poetical temperament. The hair is of that bright golden tint that Titian loved so well to paint; and its beauty has been especially recorded by more than one of her contemporaries. The poet Galeazzo da Tarsia, who professed himself, after the fashion of the time, her most fervent admirer and devoted slave, recurs in many passages of

* Visconti, *Rimi di Vit. Col.*, p. 39. See portrait prefixed to this volume.

his poems to those fascinating “chiome d’oro;” as where he sings, with more enthusiasm than taste, of the

“Trecce d’or, che in gli alti giri,
Non è che’ unqua pareggi o sole o stella;”

or again, where he tells us, that the sun and his lady-love appeared

“Ambi con chiome d’or lucide e terse.”

But the testimony of graver writers, lay and clerical, is not wanting to induce us to believe, that Vittoria in her prime really might be considered “the most beautiful woman of her day” with more truth than that hackneyed phrase often conveys. So when at length the Colonna seniors, and the Duchessa di Francavilla thought, that the fitting moment had arrived for carrying into effect the long-standing engagement—which was not till 1509, when the *promessi sposi* were both in their nineteenth year—the young couple were thoroughly in love with each other, and went to the altar with every prospect of wedded happiness.

But during these quiet years of study and development in little rock-bound Ischia, the world without was anything but quiet, as the outline of Neapolitan history in the last chapter sufficiently indicates; and Fabrizio Colonna was ever in the thick of the confusion. As long as the Aragonese monarchs kept up the struggle, he fought for them upon the losing side; but when, after the retreat of Frederick, the last of them, the contest was between the French and the Spaniards, he chose the latter, which proved to be the winning side. Frederick, on abandoning Naples, threw himself on the hospitality of the King of France, an

enemy much less hated by him than was Ferdinand of Spain, who had so shamefully deceived and betrayed him. But his high Constable, Fabrizio Colonna, not sharing, as it should seem, his sovereign's feelings on the subject, transferred his allegiance to the King of Spain. And again, this change of fealty and service seems to have been considered so much in the usual course of things, that it elicits no remark from the contemporary writers.

In fact, the noble Fabrizio, the bearer of a grand old Italian name, the lord of many a powerful barony, and owner of many a mile of fair domain, a Roman patrician of pure Italian race, to whom, if to any, the honour, the independence, the interests, and the name of Italy should have been dear, was a mere Captain of free lances,—a soldier of fortune, ready to sell his blood and great military talents in the best market. The best of his fellow nobles in all parts of Italy were the same. Their profession was fighting. And mere fighting, in whatever cause, so it were bravely and knightly done, was the most honoured and noblest profession of that day. So much of real greatness as could be imparted to the profession of war, by devotion to a *person*, might occasionally—though not very frequently in Italy—have been met with among the soldiers of that period. But all those elements of genuine heroism, which are generated by devotion to a *cause*, and all those ideas of patriotism, of resistance to wrong, and assertion of human rights, which compel the philosopher and philanthropist to admit that war may sometimes be righteous, noble, elevating, to those engaged in it, and prolific of high thoughts and great deeds, were wholly unknown to the chivalry of Italy at the time in question.

And, indeed, as far as the feeling of nationality is concerned, the institution of knighthood itself, as it then existed, was calculated to prevent the growth of patriotic sentiment. For the commonwealth of chivalry was of European extent. The knights of England, France, Italy, Spain, and Germany, were brothers in arms, linked together by a community of thought and sentiment infinitely stronger than any which bound them to the other classes of their own countrymen. The aggregation of caste wholly overbore that of nationality. And the nature of the former, though not wholly evil in its influences, any more than that of the latter is wholly good, is yet infinitely narrower, less humanising, and less ennobling in its action on human motives and conduct. And war, the leading aggregative occupation of those days, was proportionably narrowed in its scope, deteriorated in its influences, and rendered incapable of supplying that stimulus to healthy human development which it has in its more noble forms, indisputably sometimes furnished to mankind.

And it is important to the great history of modern civilisation, that these truths should be recognised and clearly understood. For this same period, which is here in question, was, as all know, one of great intellectual activity, of rapid development, and of fruitful progress. And historical speculators on these facts, finding this unusual movement of mind contemporaneous with a time of almost universal and unceasing warfare, have thought, that some of the producing causes of the former fact were to be found in the existence of the latter; and have argued, that the general ferment, and stirring up, produced by these chivalrous, but truly ignoble wars, assisted mainly in generating that exceptionally fervid condition of the

human mind. But, admitting that a time of national struggle for some worthy object may probably be found to exercise such an influence, as that attributed to the Italian wars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it is certain that these latter were of no such ennobling nature. And the causes of the great intellectual movement of those centuries must therefore be sought elsewhere.

From the time when "il gran Capitano" Consalvo, on behalf of his master, Ferdinand of Spain, having previously assisted the French in driving out the unfortunate Frederick, the last of the Aragonese kings of Naples, had afterwards finally succeeded in expelling the French from their share of the stolen kingdom, the affairs of the Colonna cousins, Fabrizio and Prospero, began to brighten. The last French troops quitted Naples on January 1, 1504. By a diploma, bearing date November 15, 1504,* and still preserved among the Colonna archives, eighteen baronies were conferred on Prospero Colonna by Ferdinand. On the 28th of the same month, all the fiefs which Fabrizio had formerly possessed in the Abruzzi were restored to him; and by another deed, dated the same day, thirty-three others, in the Abruzzi and the Terra di Lavoro, were bestowed on him.

In the meantime, earth had been relieved from the presence of the Borgia Vicegerent of heaven, and Julius II. reigned in his stead. By him the Colonna were relieved from their excommunication, and restored to all their Roman possessions. So that the news of the family fortunes, which from time to time reached the daughter of the house in her happy retirement in

* Coppi, Mem. Col., p. 249.

rocky Ischia, from the period at which she began to be of an age to appreciate the importance of such matters, were altogether favourable.

But the tranquil life there during these years was not unbroken by sympathy with the vicissitudes which were variously affecting the excitable city, over which the little recluse court looked from their island home. The untimely death of Ferdinand II., on Friday, October 7, 1496, threw the first deep shade over the household of the Duchessa di Francavilla, which had crossed it since Vittoria had become its inmate. Never, according to the contemporary journalist, Giuliano Passeri,* was prince more truly lamented by his people of every class. Almost immediately after his marriage, the young king and his wife both fell ill at Somma, near Naples. The diarist describes the melancholy spectacle of the two biers, supporting the sick king and queen, entering their capital side by side. Everything that the science of the time could suggest, even to the carrying in procession of the head as well as the blood of St. Januarius, was tried in vain. The young king, of whom so much was hoped, died; and there arose throughout the city, writes Passeri, "a cry of weeping so great, that it seemed as if the whole world were falling in ruin, all, both great and small, male and female, crying aloud to heaven for pity. So that I truly think, that since God made the world, a greater weeping than this was never known."

Then came the great Jubilee year, 1500; on which occasion a circumstance occurred, that set all Naples talking. It was discussed, we may shrewdly conjecture, in a somewhat different spirit in that Ischia household,

* Note 1.

which most interests us, from the tone in which the excitable city chattered of it. At the beginning of April,* the Neapolitans, in honour of the great Jubilee, sent a deputation, carrying with them the celebrated Virgin, della Bruna dello Carmine, who justified her reputation, and did credit to her country by working innumerable miracles all the way as she went. But what was the mortification of her bearers, when arrived at Rome, the result of the fame arising from their triumphant progress was, that Pope Borgia, jealous of a foreign Virgin, which might divert the alms of the faithful from the Roman begging boxes, showed himself so thorough a protectionist of the home manufacture, that he ordered the Neapolitan Virgin to be carried back again immediately. This had to be done; but Madonna della Bruna, nothing daunted, worked miracles faster than ever as she was being carried off, and continued to do so all the way home.

In July, 1501, there came a guest to the dwelling of Costanza d'Avalos, whose coming and going must have made a durable impression on the opening mind of Vittoria, then just eleven years old. This was Frederick, the last of the Aragonese kings. When all had gone against him, and the French had taken, and most cruelly sacked Capua, and were advancing on Naples,† he sought refuge with his wife and children on the Island of Ischia, and remained there till he left it on the 6th of September to throw himself on the generosity of the French King. Fabrizio Colonna was, it is recorded, with him on the island, where the fallen king left for awhile his wife and children; and had then an opportunity of seeing,—as far as the brave *condottiere*

* Passeri, p. 122.

† Passeri, p. 126.

chieftain had eyes to see such matters,—the progress his daughter had made in all graces and good gifts during six years of the superintendence of Costanza d'Avalos.

Then there came occasionally events, which doubtless called the Duchessa di Francavilla from her retirement to the neighbouring, but strongly contrasted scene of Naples; and in all probability furnished opportunities of showing her young pupil something of the great and gay world of the brilliant and always noisy capital. Such, for instance, was the entry of Ferdinand of Spain into Naples, on November 1, 1506. The same people, who so recently were making the greatest lamentation ever heard in the world over the death of Ferdinand of Aragon, were now equally loud and vehement* in their welcome to his false usurping kinsman, Ferdinand of Castile. A pier was run out an hundred paces into the sea for him and his queen to land at, and a tabernacle, "all of fine wrought gold," says Passeri, erected on it for him to rest in. The city wall was thrown down to make a new passage for his entrance into the city; all Naples was gay with triumphal arches and hangings. The mole, writes the same gossiping authority, was so crowded, that a grain of millet thrown among them would not have reached the ground. Nothing was to be heard in all Naples but the thunder of cannon, and nothing to be seen but velvet, silk, and brocade, and gold on all sides. The streets were lined with richly tapestried seats, filled with all the noble dames of Naples, who, as the royal cortege passed, rose, and advancing, kissed the hands of the king, "et lo signore Re di questo si pigliava

* Passeri, p. 146.

gran piacere." It is a characteristic incident of the times, that as quick as the cortège passed, all the rich and costly preparations for its passage were, as Passeri tells us, scrambled for and made booty of by the populace.

The Duchessa di Francavilla, at least, who had witnessed the melancholy departure of Frederick from her own roof, when he went forth a wanderer from his lost kingdom, must have felt the hollowness and little worth of all this noisy demonstration, if none other among the assembled crowd felt it. And it may easily be imagined how she moralised the scene to the lovely blonde girl at her side, now at sixteen, in the first bloom of her beauty, as they returned, tired with the unwonted fatigue of their gala doings, to their quiet home in Ischia.

Here is a specimen from the pages of the gossiping weaver,* of the sort of subjects which were the talk of the day in Naples in those times.

In December, 1507, a certain Spaniard, Pietro de Pace, by name, a hunchback, and much deformed, but who "was of high courage, and in terrestrial matters had no fear of spirits or of venomous animals," determined to explore the caverns of Pozzuoli; and discovered in them several bronze statues and medals, and antique lamps. He found also some remains of leaden pipes, on one of which the words "Imperator Cæsar" were legible. Moreover, he saw "certain lizards as large as vipers." But for all this, Pietro considered his adventure an unsuccessful one; for he had hoped to find hidden treasure in the caverns.

Then there was barely time for this nine days' wonder

* Passeri, p. 151.

to run out its natural span, before a very much more serious matter was occupying every mind, and making every tongue wag in Naples. On the night preceding Christmas day, in the year 1507, the Convent of St. Clare was discovered to be on fire. The building was destroyed, and the nuns, belonging mostly to noble Neapolitan families, were burnt out of their holy home;—distressing enough on many accounts. But still it was not altogether the misfortune of these holy ladies that spread consternation throughout the city. It was the practice, it seems, for a great number of the possessors of valuables of all sorts, “*Baruni od altri*,” as Passeri says,* in his homely Neapolitan dialect, to provide against the continual dangers to which moveable property was exposed, by consigning their goods to the keeping of some religious community. And the nuns of St. Clare, especially, were very largely employed in this way. The consequence was, that the almost incredibly large amount of three hundred thousand ducats worth of valuable articles of all sorts was destroyed in this disastrous fire. Taking into consideration the difference in the value of money, this sum must be calculated to represent at least a million and a half sterling of our money. And it is necessary to bear in mind how large a proportion of a rich man’s wealth in those days consisted in chattels to render the estimate of the loss at all credible.

The prices, however, at which certain of the products of artistic industry were then estimated, were such as to render such an accumulation of property possible enough. For instance, among the valuables recorded by Passeri as belonging to Ferdinand of Aragon I.,

* Passeri, p. 152.

were three pieces of tapestry, which were called "La Pastorella," and were considered to be worth 130,000 ducats.

And thus the years rolled on; Naples gradually settling down into tranquillity under the Spanish rule, administered by the first of the long list of viceroys, the "Gran Capitano," Don Consalvo de Corduba, and the star of the Colonna shining more steadily than ever in the ascendant, till in the year 1509, the nineteenth of Vittoria's and of the bridegroom's age, it was determined to celebrate the long arranged marriage.

It took place on the 27th of December in that year; and Passeri mentions,* that Vittoria came to Ischia from Marino on the occasion, escorted by a large company of Roman nobles. It appears, therefore, that she must have quitted Ischia previously. But it is probable that she did so only for a short visit to her native home, before finally settling in her husband's country.

The marriage festival was held in Ischia with all the pomp then usual on such occasions; and that, as will be seen in a subsequent page, from the accounts preserved by Passeri of another wedding, at which Vittoria was present, was a serious matter. The only particulars recorded for us of her own marriage ceremony consist of two lists of the presents reciprocally made by the bride and bridegroom. These have been printed from the original documents in the Colonna archives by Signor Visconti, and are curious illustrations of the habits and manners of that day.

The Marquis acknowledges to have received, says the document, from the Lord Fabrizio Colonna and the Lady Vittoria,

* Passeri, p. 162.

1. A bed of French fashion, with the curtains and all the hangings of crimson satin, lined with blue taffetas with large fringes of gold; with three mattresses and a counterpane of crimson satin of similar workmanship; and four pillows of crimson satin garnished with fringes and tassels of gold.

2. A cloak of crimson raised brocade.

3. A cloak of black raised brocade, and white silk.

4. A cloak of purple velvet and purple brocade.

5. A cross of diamonds and a housing for a mule of wrought gold.

The other document sets forth the presents offered by Pescara to his bride:—

1. A cross of diamonds with a chain of gold of the value of 1000 ducats.

2. A ruby, a diamond, and an emerald set in gold, of the value of 400 ducats.

3. A “desciorgh” of gold (whatever that may be) of the value of 100 ducats.

4. Twelve bracelets of gold, of the value of 40 ducats.

Then follow fifteen articles of female dress, gowns, petticoats, mantles, skirts, and various other finery with strange names, only to be explained by the ghost of some sixteenth century milliner, and altogether ignored by Ducange, and all other lexicographers. But they are described as composed of satin, velvet, brocade; besides crimson velvet trimmed with gold fringe, and lined with ermine; and flesh-coloured silk petticoats, trimmed with black velvet. The favourite colour appears to be decidedly crimson.

It is noticeable, that while all the more valuable presents of Pescara to Vittoria are priced, nothing is said of the value of her gifts to the bridegroom. Are

we to see in this an indication of a greater delicacy of feeling on the part of the lady?

So the priests did their office—a part of the celebration, which, curiously enough, we learn from Passeri, was often in those days at Naples, deferred, sometimes for years, till after the consummation of the marriage—the Pantagruelian feastings were got through, the guests departed, boat-load after boat-load, from the rocky shore of Ischia; and the little island, restored after the unusual hubbub to its wonted quiet, was left to be the scene of as happy a honeymoon as the most romantic of novel readers could wish for her favourite heroine.

CHAPTER III.

Vittoria's Married Life—Pescara goes where Glory Waits Him—The Rout of Ravenna—Pescara in Prison turns Penman—His "Dialogo di amore"—Vittoria's Poetical Epistle to her Husband—Vittoria and the Marchese del Vasto—Three Cart-loads of Ladies, and three Mule-loads of Sweetmeats—Character of Pescara—His Cruelty—Anecdote in Proof of it.

THE two years which followed, Vittoria always looked back on as the only truly happy portion of her life, and many are the passages of her poems which recall their tranquil and unbroken felicity, a sweet dream, from which she was too soon to be awakened to the ordinary vicissitudes of sixteenth century life. The happiest years of individuals, as of nations, afford least materials for history, and of Vittoria's two years of honeymoon in Ischia, the whole record is that she was happy; and she wrote no poetry.

Early in 1512 came the waking from this pleasant dream. Pescara was, of course, to be a soldier. In his position not to have begun to fight, as soon as his beard was fairly grown, would have been little short of infamy. So he set forth to join the army in Lombardy, in company with his father-in-law, Fabrizio. Of course there was an army in Lombardy, where towns were being besieged, fields laid waste, and glory to be had for the winning. There always was, in those good old times of course. French, Swiss, Spanish, German, Venetian, Papal, and Milanese troops were fighting each other,

with changes of alliances and sides almost as frequent and as confusing as the changing of partners in a cotillion. It is troublesome and not of much consequence to understand who were just then friends and who foes, and what were the exact objects all the different parties had in cutting each other's throats. And it will be quite sufficient to say that the Duchy of Milan was at that moment the chief bone of contention,—that the principal pretenders to the glory of “annexing” it were the King of France and the King of Spain, who was now also King of Naples—that the Pope was just then allied with Spain, and the Venetians with France, and that Italy generally was preparing for the destiny she has worked out for herself, by the constant endeavour to avail herself of the destroying presence of these foreign troops, and their rivalries, for the prosecution of her internal quarrels, and the attainment of equally low and yet more unjustifiable, because fratricidal aims.

Pescara, as a Neapolitan subject of the King of Spain, joined the army opposed to the French, under the walls of Ravenna. Vittoria, though her subsequent writings prove how much the parting cost her, showed how thoroughly she was a soldier's daughter and a soldier's wife. There had been some suggestion, it seems, that the marquis, as the sole surviving scion of an ancient and noble name, might fairly consider it his duty not to subject it to the risk of extinction by exposing his life in the field. The young soldier, however, wholly refused to listen to such counsels; and his wife strongly supported his view of the course honour counselled him to follow, by advice, which a young and beautiful wife, who was to remain surrounded by a brilliant circle of wits and poets, would scarcely

have ventured on offering, had she not felt a perfect security from all danger of being misinterpreted, equally creditable to wife and husband.

So the young soldier took for a motto on his shield, the well-known "With this, or on this;" and having expended, we are told, much care and cash on a magnificent equipment, was at once appointed to the command of the light cavalry. The knowledge and experience necessary for such a position comes by nature, it must be supposed, to the descendant of a long line of noble knights, as surely as pointing does to the scion of a race of pointers. But the young warrior's episcopal* biographer cursorily mentions, that certain old and trusty veterans, who had obtained their military science by experience, and not by right of birth, were attached to his person.

The general of light cavalry arrived at the camp at an unfortunate moment. The total defeat of the United Spanish and Papal army by the French before Ravenna on the 9th of April, 1512, immediately followed. Fabrizio Colonna and his son-in-law were both made prisoners. The latter had been left for dead on the field, covered with wounds, which subsequently gave occasion to Isabella of Aragon, Duchess of Milan, to say, "I would fain be a man, Signor Marchese, if it were only to receive such wounds as yours in the face, that I might see if they would become me as they do you."*

Pescara, when picked up from the field, was carried a prisoner to Milan, where, by means of the good offices and powerful influence of Trivulzio, who had married Beatrice d'Avalos, Pescara's aunt, and was now a

* Giovio, Bp. of Como. Life of Pescara, book i.

† Filocalo, MS. Life of Pescara, cited by Visconti, p. lxxxii.

general in the service of France, his detention was rendered as little disagreeable as possible, and he was, as soon as his wounds were healed, permitted to ransom himself for six thousand ducats.*

During his short confinement he amused his leisure by composing a "Dialogo d'Amore," which he inscribed and sent to his wife. The Bishop of Como, his biographer, testifies that this work was exceedingly pleasant reading—"summæ jucunditatis"—and full of grave and witty conceits and thoughts. The world, however, has seen fit to allow this treasury of wit to perish, notwithstanding the episcopal criticism. And in all probability the world was in the right. If, indeed, the literary general of light horse had written his own real thoughts and speculations on love, there might have been some interest in seeing a sixteenth century soldier's views on that ever interesting subject. But we may be quite certain, that the Dialogo, "stuffed full," as Giovio says, "of grave sentiments and exquisite conceits," contained only a reproduction of the classic banalities, and ingenious absurdities, which were current in the fashionable literature of the day. Yet it must be admitted, that the employment of his leisure in any such manner, and still more, the dedication of his labours on such a subject to his wife, are indications of an amount of cultivation and right feeling, which would hardly have been found, either one or the other, among many of the preux chevaliers, his brothers-in-arms.

Meanwhile, Vittoria, on her part, wrote a poetical epistle to her husband in prison, which is the first production of her pen that has reached us. It is

* Giovio, lib. i.

written in Dante's "terza rima," and consists of 112 lines. Both Italian and French critics have expressed highly favourable judgments of this little poem. And it may be admitted that the lines are elegant, classical, well-turned, and ingenious. But those who seek something more than all this in poetry—who look for passion, high and noble thoughts, happy illustration or deep analysis of human feeling, will find nothing of the sort. That Vittoria did feel acutely her husband's misfortune, and bitterly regret his absence from her, there is every reason to believe. But she is unable to express these sentiments naturally or forcibly. She, in all probability made no attempt to do so, judging from the models on which she had been taught to form her style, that when she sat down to make poetry, the aim to be kept in view was a very different one. Hence we have talk of Hector and Achilles, Eolus, Sirens, and marine deities, Pompey, Cornelia, Cato, Martia, and Mithridates—a parade of all the treasures of the schoolroom. The pangs of the wife left lonely in her home are in neatly antithetical phrase contrasted with the dangers and toils of the husband in the field. Then we have a punning allusion to her own name:—

“ Se Vittoria volevi, io t'era appresso;
Ma tu, lasciando me, lasciasti lei.”

“ If victory was thy desire, I was by thy side ; but in leaving me, thou didst leave also her.”

The best, because the simplest and most natural lines are the following:—

“ Seguir si deve il sposo e dentro e fora;
E, s' egli pate affanno, ella patisca;
Se lieto, lieta; e se vi more, mora.
A quel che arrisca l'un, l' altro s' arrisca;
Eguali in vita, eguali siano in morte;
E ciò che avviene a lui, a lei sortisca.”

“At home or abroad the wife should follow her husband; and if he suffers distress, she should suffer; should be joyful if he is joyful, and should die if he dies. The danger confronted by the one should be confronted by the other; equals in life, they should be equal in death; and that which happens to him should be her lot also,”—a mere farrago of rhetorical prettinesses, as cold as a school-boy’s prize verses, and unanimated by a spark of genuine feeling; although the writer was as truly affectionate a wife as ever man had.

But, although all that Vittoria wrote, and all that the vast number of the poets and poetesses, her contemporaries, wrote, was obnoxious to the same remarks; still it will be seen, that in the maturity of her powers she could do better than this. Her religious poetry may be said, generally, to be much superior to her love verses; either because they were composed when her mind had grown to its full stature, or, as seems probable, because, model wife as she was, the subject took a deeper hold of her mind, and stirred the depths of her heart more powerfully.

Very shortly after the despatch of her poetical epistle, Vittoria was overjoyed by the unexpected return of her husband. And again for a brief interval she considered herself the happiest of women.

One circumstance indeed there was to mar the entirety of her contentment. She was still childless. And it seems, that the science of that day, ignorantly dogmatical, undertook to assert, that she would continue to be so. Both husband and wife seem to have submitted to the award undoubtingly; and the dictum, however rashly uttered, was justified by the event.

Under these circumstances, Vittoria undertook the education of Alphonso d’Avalos, Marchese del Vasto, a

young cousin of her husband's. The task was a sufficiently arduous one;* for the boy, beautiful, it is recorded, as an angel, and endowed with excellent capabilities of all sorts, was so wholly unbroken, and of so violent and ungovernable a disposition, that he had been the despair and terror of all who had hitherto attempted to educate him. Vittoria thought that she saw in the wild and passionate boy the materials of a worthy man. The event fully justified her judgment, and proved the really superior powers of mind she must have brought to the accomplishment of it. Alphonso became a soldier of renown, not untinctured by those literary tastes which so remarkably distinguished his gentle preceptress. A strong and lasting affection grew between them; and Vittoria, proud with good reason of her work, was often wont to say, that the reproach of being childless ought not to be deemed applicable to her whose moral nature might well be said to have brought forth that of her pupil.

Pescara's visit to Naples was a very short one. Early in 1513, we find him again with the armies in Lombardy, taking part in most of the mischief and glory going.

Under the date of July the 4th in that year, the gossiping Naples weaver, who rarely fails to note the doings of the Neapolitan General of light horse with infinite pride and admiration, has preserved for us a rather picturesque little bit of Ariosto-flavoured camp life. The Spanish army, under Don Raymond di Cardona, who, on Consalvo's death had succeeded him as Viceroy of Naples, was on its march from Peshiera to Verona, when a messenger from the beautiful young

* Visconti, p. 77.

Marchioness of Mantua came to the General-in-chief to say that she wished to see those celebrated Spanish troops, who were marching under his banners, and was then waiting their passage in the vineyards of the Castle of Villafranca. "A certain gentle lady of Mantua, named the Signora Laura, with whom Don Raymond was in love," writes the weaver, was with the Marchioness; and much pleased was he at the message. So word was passed to the various captains; and when the column reached the spot, where the Marchioness with a great number of ladies and cavaliers of Mantua were reposing in the shade of the vines, "Don Ferrante d'Alarcone, as Chief Marshal, with his bâton in his hand made all the troops halt, and place themselves in order of battle; and the Signor Marchese di Pescara marched at the head of the infantry, with a pair of breeches cut after the Swiss fashion, and a plume on his head, and a two-handed sword in his hand, and all the standards were unfurled." And when the Marchioness from among the vines looking down through the chequered shade on to the road saw that all was in order, she and her ladies got into three carts, so that there came out of the vineyard, says Passeri, three cartful of ladies surrounded by the cavaliers of Mantua on horseback. There they came very slowly jolting over the cultivated ground, those three heavy bullock carts, with their primitive wheels of one solid circular piece of wood, and their huge cream-coloured oxen with enormous horned heads gaily decorated, as Leopold Robert shows them to us, and the brilliant tinted dresses of the laughing bevy drawn by them, glancing gaudily in the sun-light among the soberer colouring of the vineyards in their summer pride of green. Then Don Raymond and Pescara advanced to

the carts, and handed from them the Marchioness and Donna Laura, who mounted on handsomely equipped jennets prepared for them. It does not appear that this attention was extended to any of the other ladies, who must therefore be supposed to have remained sitting in the carts, while the Marchioness and the favoured Donna Laura rode through the ranks "con multa festa et gloria." And when she had seen all, with much pleasure and admiration, on a given signal three mules loaded with sweetmeats were led forward, with which the gay Marchioness "regaled all the captains." Then all the company with much content, —excepting, it is to be feared, the soldiers, who had to stand at arms under the July sun, while their officers were eating sugar-plums, and Don Raymond and Donna Laura were saying and swallowing sweet things,—took leave of each other, the army pursuing its march towards Verona, and the Marchioness and her ladies returning in their carts to Mantua.*

The other scattered notices of Pescara's doings during his campaign are of a less festive character. They show him to have been a hard and cruel man, reckless of human suffering, and eminent even among his fellow captains for the ferocity, and often wantonness of the ravages and wide-spread misery he wrought. On more than one occasion, Passeri winds up his narrative of some destruction of a town, or desolation of a fertile and cultivated district, by the remark, that the cruelty committed was worse than Turks would have been guilty of. Yet this same Passeri, an artisan, belonging to a class which had all to suffer and nothing to gain from such atrocities, writes, when chronicling

* Passeri, p. 197.

this same Pescara's* death, that "on that day died, I would have you know, gentle readers, the most glorious and honoured captain that the world has seen for the last hundred years." It is curious to observe how wholly the popular mind was enslaved to the prejudices and conventional absurdities of the ruling classes; how entirely the feelings of the masses were in unison with those of the caste which oppressed them; how little reason they conceived they had to complain under the most intolerable treatment, and how little hope of progressive amelioration there was from the action of native-bred public opinion.

Bishop Giovio, the biographer and panegyrist of Pescara admits, that he was a stern and cruelly-severe disciplinarian; and mentions an anecdote in proof of it. A soldier was brought before him for having entered a house *en route* for the purpose of plundering. The General ordered that his ears should be cut off. The culprit remonstrated; and begged, with many entreaties, to be spared so dishonouring and ignominious a punishment, saying in his distress that death itself would have been more tolerable.

"The grace demanded is granted," rejoined Pescara instantly, with grim pleasantry. "Take this soldier, who is so careful of his honour, and hang him to that tree!"

In vain did the wretch beg not to be taken at his word so cruelly, no entreaties sufficed to change the savage decree.

It will be well that we should bear in mind these indications of the essential nature of this great and glorious captain, who had studied those ingenuous arts

* Passeri, p. 326.

which soften the character, and do not suffer men to be ferocious, as the poet assures us, and who could write dialogues on love, when we come to consider the curious phenomenon of Vittoria's unmeasured love for her husband.

CHAPTER IV.

Society in Ischia.—Bernardo Tasso's sonnet thereon.—How a wedding was celebrated at Naples in 1517.—A Sixteenth Century trousseau.—Sack of Genoa—The Battle of Pavia—Italian conspiracy against Charles V.—Character of Pescara.—Honour in 1525—Pescara's treason.—Vittoria's sentiments on the occasion.—Pescara's infamy.—Patriotism unknown in Italy in the Sixteenth Century.—No such sentiment to be found in the writings of Vittoria.—Evil influence of her husband's character on her mind—Death of Pescara.

MEANWHILE, Vittoria continued her peaceful and quiet life in Ischia, lonely indeed, as far as the dearest affections of her heart were concerned, but cheered and improved by the society of that select knot of poets and men of learning, whom Costanza di Francavilla, not unassisted by the presence of Vittoria, attracted to her little island court. We find Musefilo, Filocalo, Giovio, Minturno, Cariteo, Rota, Sanazzaro, and Bernardo Tasso, among those who helped to make this remote rock celebrated throughout Europe at that day, as one of the best loved haunts of Apollo and the Muses,—to speak in the phraseology of the time.

Many among them have left passages recording the happy days spent on that fortunate island. The social circle was doubtless a charming and brilliant one, and the more so, as contrasted with the general tone and habits of the society of the period. But the style of the following sonnet by Bernardo Tasso, selected by Visconti as a specimen of the various effusions by

members of the select circle upon the subject, while it accurately illustrates the prevailing modes of thought and diction of that period, will hardly fail to suggest the idea of a comparison—*mutatis mutandis*—between this company of sixteenth century choice spirits, and that which assembled, and provoked so severe a lashing in the memorable Hôtel de Rambouillet, more than an hundred years afterwards. But an Italian Molière is as wholly impossible in the nature of things, as a French Dante. And the sixteenth century swarm of Petrarchists and Classicists have, unlike true prophets, found honour in their own country.

Gentle Bernardo celebrates in this wise these famed Ischia meetings :—

“ Superbo scoglio, altero e bel ricetto
 Di tanti chiari eroi, d'imperadori,
 Onde raggi di gloria escono fuori,
 Ch' ogni altro lume fan scuro e negletto ;
 Se per vera virtute al ben perfetto
 Salir si puote ed agli eterni onori,
 Queste più d' altre degne alme e migliori
 V' andran, che chiudi nel petroso petto.
 Il lume è in te dell' armi ; in te s' asconde
 Casta beltà, valore e cortesia,
 Quanta mai vide il tempo, o diede il cielo.
 Ti sian secondi i fati, e il vento e l' onde
 Rendanti onore, e l' aria tua natia
 Abbia sempre temprato il caldo e il gelo ! ”

Which may be thus “done into English,” for the sake of giving those unacquainted with the language of the original, some tolerably accurate idea of Messer Bernardo's euphuisms.

“ Proud rock ! the loved retreat of such a band
 Of earth's best, noblest, greatest, that their light
 Pales other glories to the dazzled sight,
 And like a beacon shines throughout the land,

If truest worth can reach the perfect state,
 And man may hope to merit heavenly rest,
 Those whom thou harbourest in thy rocky breast,
 First in the race will reach the heavenly gate.
 Glory of martial deeds is thine. In thee,
 Brightest the world e'er saw, or heaven gave,
 Dwell chastest beauty, worth, and courtesy!
 Well be it with thee! May both wind and sea
 Respect thee: and thy native air and wave
 Be temper'd ever by a genial sky!"

Such is the poetry of one of the brightest stars of the Ischian galaxy; and the incredulous reader is assured that it would be easy to find much worse sonnets by the ream, among the extant productions of the crowd, who were afflicted with the prevalent Petrarch mania of that epoch. The statistical returns of the ravages of this malady, given by the poetical registrar-general Crescimbeni, would astonish even Paternoster Row at the present day. But Vittoria Colonna, though a great number of her sonnets do not rise above the level of Bernardo Tasso in the foregoing specimen, could occasionally, especially in her later years, reach a much higher tone, as will, it is hoped, be shown in a future chapter.

It has been suggested, that the religious feelings which inspired her latter poetry, were, though not more genuine, yet more absorbing than the conjugal love, which is almost exclusively the theme of her earlier efforts. And it is at all events certain, that the former so engrossed her whole mind, as to sever her in a great measure from the world. This the so fervently sung pangs of separation from her husband do not appear to have effected.

Besides the constant society of the select few, of whom mention has been made, there were occasionally gayer doings in Ischia; as when in February, 1517, a

brilliant festival was held there on occasion of the marriage* of Don Alfonso Piccolomini with Costanza d'Avalos, the sister of Vittoria's pupil, the Marchese del Vasto. And occasionally the gentle poetess, necessitated probably by the exigences of her social position, would leave her beloved Ischia for brilliant and noisy Naples. And when these necessities did occur, it is recorded, that the magnificence and pomp, with which the beautiful young wife made her appearance among her fellow nobles, was such, as few of them could equal, and none surpass.

One of these occasions is worth specially noting, for the sake of the detailed account, which has been preserved of it by that humble and observant chronicler, our friend the weaver. For it contains traits and indications, curiously and amusingly illustrative of the life and manners of that time in Naples.

It was December 6, 1517, and high festival was to be held for the marriage of the King of Poland with Donna Bona Sforza. The guests comprised the whole nobility of Naples; and worthy Passeri begins his account with an accurate Morning-Post-like statement of the costume of each in the order of their arrival at the church. Doubtless the eager weaver, a shrewd judge of such matters, had pushed himself into a good place in the front row of the crowd, who lined the roadway of the noble guests, and might have been seen with tablets in hand, taking notes with busy excitement to be transferred to his journal at night. One after another the high-sounding titles, very many of them Spanish, are set forth, as they swept by, brilliant with

* Passeri, p. 234.

gold and every brightest tint of costly fabric, and are swallowed up by the dark nave of the huge church.

It is not necessary to attempt a translation of all the changes Master Passeri rings on velvet, satin, gold, brocade, and costly furs. Merely noting that the bride's dress is estimated to be worth seven thousand ducats, we let them all pass on till "The illustrious lady the Signora Vittoria, Marchioness of Pescara," arrives. She is mounted on a black and white jennet, with housings of crimson velvet, fringed with gold. She is accompanied by six ladies in waiting, uniformly clad in azure damask, and attended by six grooms on foot, with cloaks and jerkins of blue and yellow satin. The lady herself wears a robe of brocaded crimson velvet, with large branches of beaten gold on it. She has a crimson satin cap, with a head-dress of wrought gold above it; and around her waist is a girdle of beaten gold.

Some of the assembled company, one might think, would require their girdles to be of some more yielding material. For, on quitting the church, they sat down to table at six in the evening, "and began to eat," says Passeri, "and left off at five in the morning!" The order and materials of this more than Homeric feast, are handed down to posterity with scrupulous accuracy by our chronicler. But the stupendous menu, in its entirety, would be almost as intolerable to the reader, as having to sit out the eleven hours orgy in person. A few particulars culled here and there, partly because they are curious, and partly because the meaning of the words is more intelligible than is the case in many instances, even to a Neapolitan of the present day, will amply suffice.

There were twenty-seven courses. Then the quantity

of sugar used, was made, as we have noticed on a former occasion at Rome, a special subject of glorification. There was "putaggio Ungarese," Hungary soup, stuffed peacocks, quince pies, and thrushes served with bergamottes, which were not pears, as an English reader might perhaps suppose, but small highly scented citrons, of the kind, from which the perfume of that name is, or is supposed, to be made. With the "bianco mangiare," our familiarity with "blanc-mange," seems at first sight to make us more at home. But we are thrown out by finding, that it was eaten in 1517, "con mostarda." The dishes of pastry seem according to our habits, much out of proportion to the rest. Sweet preparations also, whether of animal or vegetable composition, seem greatly to preponderate. At the queen's own table, a fountain gave forth odoriferous waters. But, to all the guests, perfumed water for the hands was served at the removal of the first tables.

"And thus having passed this first day with infinite delight," the whole party passed a second, and a third, in the same manner!

That eleven hours should have been spent in eating and drinking is of course simply impossible. Large interludes must be supposed to have been occupied by music, and very likely by recitations of poetry. On the first day a considerable time must have been taken up by a part of the ceremonial, which was doubtless far more interesting to the fairer half of the assembly than the endless gormandising. This was a display, article by article, of the bride's trousseau, which took place while the guests were still sitting at table. Passeri minutely catalogues the whole exhibition. The list begins with twenty pairs of sheets, all embroidered with different coloured silks; and seven

pairs of sheets, "d'olanda," of Dutch linen, fringed with gold. Then come an hundred and five shirts of Dutch linen, all embroidered with silk of divers colours; and seventeen shirts of cambric, "cambraia," with a selvage of gold, as a present for the royal bridegroom. There were twelve head-dresses, and six ditto, ornamented with gold and coloured silk, for his majesty; an hundred and twenty handkerchiefs, embroidered with gold cord; ninety-six caps, ornamented with gold and silk, of which thirty-six were for the king. There were eighteen counterpanes of silk, one of which was wrought "alla moresca;" forty-eight sets of stamped leather hangings, thirty-six others "of the ostrich egg pattern," sixteen "of the artichoke pattern," and thirty-six of silk tapestry. Beside all these hundred sets, there were eight large pieces of Flanders arras, "con seta assai." They represented the seven works of mercy, and were valued at a thousand golden ducats. There was a litter, carved and gilt, with its four mattresses of blue embroidered satin. Passing on to the plate department, we have a silver waiter, two large pitchers wrought in relief, three basins, an ewer, and six large cups, twelve large plates, twelve ditto of second size, and twenty-four soup-plates made "alla franzese," a massive salt-cellar, a box of napkins, spoons, and jugs, four large candlesticks, two large flasks, a silver pail, and a cup of gold worth two hundred ducats for the king's use. Then for the chapel, a furniture for the altar, with the history of the three kings embroidered in gold on black velvet; a missal on parchment, with illuminated miniatures, bound in velvet ornamented with silver clasps and bosses; and a complete set of requisites for the service in silver. Then, returning to the personal department, came

twenty-one gowns, each minutely described, and one of blue satin spangled with bees in solid gold, particularly specified as being worth four thousand ducats.

When all this and much more had been duly admired, there were brought forward an empty casket and fifteen trays, in which were an hundred thousand ducats of gold, which were put into the casket "before all the Signori." But our chronicler is compelled by his love of truth to add reluctantly that there were several false ducats among them.*

It is evident from the nature of many of the articles in the above list, that this "trousseau" was not merely a bride's fitting out purchased for the occasion, but was a collection of all the Lady Bona's chattel property, and represented, as was then usually the case with all wealthy persons, a very large, if not the principal part, of her worldly goods.

It may well be imagined, that Vittoria was not sorry to return to the quiet and intellectual society of Ischia after these tremendous three days at Naples. There she was cheered from time to time by three or four short visits from her husband; and by continual tidings of his increasing reputation and advancement in dignity and wealth; a prosperity which she considered dearly purchased by his almost continual absence. The death of her father Fabrizio in March, 1520, and that of her mother in 1522, made her feel more poignantly this loneliness of heart.

In October of 1522, Pescara made a flying visit to his wife and home. He was with her three days only, and then hastened back to the army. It was the last time she ever saw him. His career with the army

* See Note 2.

meantime was very glorious. In May, 1522, he took and sacked Genoa; "con la maggior crudelitate de lo mundo," writes admiring Passeri. The plundering lasted a day and a half; and "da che lo mundo fo mundo," never was seen a sacking of so great riches, "for there was not a single soldier who did not at the least get a thousand ducats." Then, with the year 1525 came, on the 24th of February, the memorable day of Pavia, which was so glorious that, as Passeri writes, the desolation inflicted by it on the country around was such, that neither house, tree, nor vine was to be seen for miles. All was burned. Few living creatures were to be met with, and those subsisting miserably on roots.

The result of that "field of honour" is sufficiently well known. Pescara, who received three wounds, though none of them serious, in the battle, considered that he was ill-used, when the royal captive Francis was taken out of his hands to Spain, and made complaints on the subject to his master Charles V., who had succeeded Ferdinand on the thrones of Spain and Naples in 1516. He was now, however, at the age of thirty-five, general-in-chief for that monarch in Lombardy, and enjoyed his perfect confidence, when circumstances arose calculated to try his fidelity severely. Whether that, almost the only virtue recognised, honoured, and professed by his own class at that day, remained altogether intact and unblemished is doubtful. But it is certain, that in any view of the case, his conduct was such as would consign him to utter infamy in any somewhat more morally enlightened age than his own, and such as any noble-hearted man, however untaught, would have instinctively shrunk from even then.

The circumstances briefly were as follows :—

Clement VII., who had succeeded to the Popedom in 1523, had, after much trimming and vacillation between Francis I. and Charles V., become, like the rest of Italy, exceedingly alarmed at the preponderating power of Charles, after the discomfiture of the French at Pavia. Now the discontent of Pescara, mentioned above, being notorious, the Pope and his counsellors, especially Giberti, Bishop of Verona, and Morone, Chancellor and Prime Minister of the Duke of Milan, thought that it might not be impossible to induce him to turn traitor to Charles, and make use of the army under his command to crush once and for ever the Spanish power in Italy. The prime mover and agent in this conspiracy was Morone, who had the reputation of being one of the profoundest and most far-sighted statesmen of his day. Guicciardini* has recorded, that he (the historian) had often heard Morone declare, that there did not exist a worse or more faithless man in all Italy than Pescara. The conspiring Chancellor, therefore, being empowered by the Pope to promise the malcontent general the throne of Naples as the price of his treason, thought that he might well venture to make the proposal.

Pescara received his overtures favourably, saying, that *if he could be satisfied that what was proposed to him could be done without injury to his honour*, he would willingly undertake it, and accept the reward offered to him.† Upon this reply being communicated to the Pope, a couple of cardinals forthwith wrote to the Marchese, assuring him that the treason required of him was, “according to the dispositions and ordinances

* Ist. Ital., lib. xvi. cap. 4.

† Varchi, Storia Fiorentina, vol. i. p. 88, edit. Firenze, 1843.

of the laws, civil as well as canon,"* perfectly consistent with the nicest honour. Meanwhile, however, it chanced, that one Messer Gismondo Santi, who had been sent by the conspirators with letters on the subject into France or Switzerland, was murdered for the purpose of robbery by an inkeeper with whom he lodged at Bergamo, and was buried under the staircase, as was discovered some years afterwards. And as no tidings were heard of this messenger, all engaged in the plot, and Pescara among them, suspected that he had been waylaid for the sake of his dispatches, and that thus all was probably made known to Charles. Thereupon Pescara immediately wrote to the Emperor, revealing the whole conspiracy, and declaring that he had given ear to their proposals only for the purpose of obtaining full information of the conspirators' designs.

Such is the version of the story given by Varchi, probably the most trustworthy of all the numerous contemporary historians. He adds, "it is not unknown to me, that many say, and perhaps think, that the Marchese, acting loyally from the beginning, had all along given the emperor true information of everything; all which I, for my part, knowing nothing further than what I have said, will not undertake to deny. It would, indeed, be agreeable to me to believe that it was so, rather than that the character of so great a soldier should be stained with so foul a blot. Though, indeed, I know not what sort of loyalty or sincerity that may be, which consists in having deceived and betrayed by vile trickery and fraud a Pope, who, if nothing else, was at least very friendly to him, a republic such as that of Venice, and many other

* Varchi, p. 89.

personages, for the sake of acquiring favour with his master. This I know well, that the lady Vittoria Colonna, his wife, a woman of the highest character, and abounding in all the virtues which can adorn her sex, had no sooner heard of the intrigue on foot, than, wholly untempted by the brilliant hope hung out to her, she with infinite sorrow and anxiety wrote most warmly to her husband, urging him to bethink him of his hitherto unstained character, and to weigh well what he was about, assuring him that as far as she was concerned, she had no wish to be the wife of a king, but only of a loyal and upright man."

This letter from Vittoria, urging her husband not to be seduced to swerve from the path of honour and duty, is recorded by most of the writers; and Visconti asserts, that it was the means of inducing Pescara to abandon the idea of betraying his sovereign. At all events, the existence of such a letter is very strong evidence that Pescara had *not* from the first informed Charles of the plot, but *had* at least hesitated whether he should not join in it, inasmuch as his communications to her upon the subject had given her reason to fear lest he should do so.

On the other hand, it is fair to observe, that several of those concerned in the intrigue saw reason to suspect the possibility of Pescara's having from the first listened to their overtures only to betray them; as is proved by extant letters from one to another of them.*

Perhaps this, too, was consistent with the nicest honour, as defined "by the ordinances of canon and civil law." But whether he were a traitor to his king or not, he was determined to shrink from no depth of

* *Lettere de Principi*, vol. i. p. 87. See Letters from Giberto to Gismondo Santo, and to Domenico Sanli.

treachery towards his dupes, that could serve to ingratiate him with his master. While still feigning to accede to their proposals, he sent to Morone to come to him at Novara, that all might be arranged between them. Morone, against the advice of many of his friends, and, as Guicciardini thought,* with a degree of imprudence astonishing in so practised and experienced a man, went to the meeting. He was received in the most cordial manner by Pescara, who, as soon as they were alone together, led him to speak of all the details of the proposed plan. The trap was complete; for behind the hangings of the room in which they were sitting, he had hidden Antonio da Leyva, one of the generals of the Spanish army, who arrested him as he was quitting the house, and took him to the prison of Novara, where Pescara the next day had the brazen audacity to examine as a judge the man whom a few hours previously he had talked with as an accomplice.†

‡ Surely, whichever version of the story may be believed, as to Pescara's original intentions, there is enough here in evidence to go far towards justifying Chancellor Morone's opinion, that he was one of the worst and most faithless men in Italy. Some modern Italian writers, with little moral, and less historical knowledge, have rested the gravamen of the charge against him on his want of patriotic Italian feeling on the occasion. In the first place, no such motive, however laudable in itself, could have justified him in being guilty of the treason proposed to him. In the second place, the class of ideas in question can hardly be found to have had any existence at that period, although distinct traces of such may be met with in Italian his-

* Storia, lib. xvii. chap. iv.

† Guicciardini, lib. xvii. chap. iv.

tory 200 years earlier. Certainly the Venetian Senate were not actuated by any such; and still more absurd would it be to attribute them to Pope Clement. It is possible that Morone, and perhaps still more, Giberti, may not have been untinged by them.

But Pescara was one of the last men, even had he been as high-minded as we find him to have been the reverse, in whom to look for Italian "*fuori i barbari*" enthusiasm. Of noble Spanish blood, his family had always been the counsellors, friends, and close adherents of a Spanish dynasty at Naples, and the man himself was especially Spanish in all his sympathies and ideas. "He adopted,"* says Giovio, "in all his costume the Spanish fashion, and always preferred to speak in that language to such a degree, that with Italians, and even with Vittoria his wife, he talked Spanish." And elsewhere he is said to have been in the habit of expressing his regret that he was not born a Spaniard.

Such habits and sentiments would have been painful enough to a wife, a Roman and a Colonna, if Vittoria had been sufficiently in advance of her age to have conceived patriotic ideas of Italian nationality. But though her pursuits and studies were infinitely more likely to have led her mind to such thoughts, than were those of the actors in the political drama of the time to generate any such notions in them, yet no trace of any sentiment of the kind is to be found in her writings. Considering the extent of the field over which her mind had travelled, her acquaintance with classical literature, and with the history of her own country, it may seem surprising that a nature, certainly capable of

* Vita, lib. i.

high and noble aspirations, should have remained untouched by one of the noblest. That it was so is a striking proof of the utter insensibility of the age to any feelings of the sort. It is possible too, that the tendencies and modes of thought of her husband on the subject of Italy may have exercised a repressing influence in this respect on Vittoria's mind; for who does not know how powerfully a woman's intelligence and heart may be elevated or degraded by the nature of the object of her affections; and, doubtless, to Vittoria as to so many another of every age do the admirable lines of the poet address themselves:—

“Thou shalt lower to his level day by day,
 What is fine within thee growing coarse to sympathise with
 clay.
 As the husband is, the wife is; thou art mated with a clown,
 And the grossness of his nature will have weight to drag
 thee down.”

When we come to examine the tone of sentiment prevailing in Vittoria's poetry, other indications of this deteriorating influence will be perceptible, and if much of nobleness, purity, high aspiration be nevertheless still found in her, this partial immunity from the evil influence must be attributed to the trifling duration of that portion of her life passed in her husband's company.

Pescara was not unrewarded for the infamy with which he covered himself in the service of his master. He obtained the rank of Generalissimo of the imperial forces in Italy. But he enjoyed the gratification for a very little while. In the latter end of that year, he fell into a state of health which seems to have been not well accounted for by the medical science of that day. The wounds he had received at Pavia in the previous

February are specially described by Passeri as having been very slight. Some writers have supposed that either shame for the part he had acted in the Morone affair, or, with greater probability, misgiving as to the possibility of the emperor's discovering the real truth of the facts (for the fate of Gismondo Santi and his papers was not known yet), was the real cause of his illness. It seems clearly to have been of the nature of a sudden and premature decay of all the vital forces.

Towards the end of the year he abandoned all hope of recovery, and sent to his wife to desire her to come to him with all speed. He was then at Milan. She set out instantly on her painful journey, and had reached Viterbo on her way northwards, when she was met by the news of his death.

It took place on the 25th of November, 1525. He was buried on the 30th of that month, says Giovio, at Milan; but the body was shortly afterwards transported with great pomp and magnificence to Naples.

CHAPTER V.

Vittoria, a Widow, with the Nuns of San Silvestro.—Returns to Ischia.
—Her Poetry divisible into two classes.—Specimens of her Sonnets.
—They rapidly attain celebrity throughout Italy.—Vittoria's sentiments towards her Husband.—Her unblemished Character.—Platonic Love.—The Love Poetry of the Sixteenth Century.

VITTORIA became thus a widow in the thirty-sixth year of her age. She was still in the full pride of her beauty, as contemporary writers assert, and as two extant medals, struck at Milan shortly before her husband's death, attest. One of them presents the bust of Pescara on the obverse, and that of Vittoria on the reverse; the other has the same portrait of her on the obverse, and a military trophy on the reverse. The face represented is a very beautiful one, and seen thus in profile is perhaps more pleasing than the portrait, which has been spoken of in a previous chapter. She was moreover even now probably the most celebrated woman in Italy, although she had done little as yet to achieve that immense reputation which awaited her a few years later. Very few probably of her sonnets were written before the death of her husband.

But the exalted rank and prominent position of her own family, the high military grade and reputation of her husband, the wide-spread hopes and fears of which he had recently been the centre in the affair of the conspiracy, joined to the fame of her talents, learning,

and virtues, which had been made the subject of enthusiastic praise by nearly all the Ischia knot of poets and wits, rendered her a very conspicuous person in the eyes of all Italy. Her husband's premature and unexpected death added a source of interest of yet another kind to her person. A young, beautiful, and very wealthy widow, gave rise to quite as many hopes, speculations, and designs in the sixteenth century as in any other.

But Vittoria's first feeling, on receiving that fatal message at Viterbo, was, that she could never again face that world, which was so ready to open its arms to her. Escape from the world, solitude, a cell, whose walls should resemble, as nearly as might be, those of the grave, since that asylum was denied to her, was her only wish. And she hastened, stunned by her great grief, to Rome, with the intention of throwing herself into a cloister. The convent of San Silvestro in Capite—so called from the supposed possession by the community of the Baptist's head—had always been a special object of veneration to the Colonna family; and there she sought a retreat. Her many friends, well knowing the desperation of her affliction, feared, that acting under the spur of its first violence, she would take the irrevocable step of pronouncing the vows. That a Vittoria Colonna should be so lost to the world was not to be thought of. So, Jacopo Sadoleto, Bishop of Carpentras, and afterwards made a cardinal by Pope Paul III., one of the most learned men of his day, himself a poet, and an intimate friend of Vittoria, hastened to Pope Clement, whose secretary he was at the time, and obtained from him a brief addressed to the abbess and nuns of San Silvestro, enjoining them to receive into their house, and console to the best of their ability the Marchesana di Pescara,

“omnibus spiritualibus et temporalibus consolationibus,” but forbidding them, under pain of the greater excommunication, to permit her to take the veil, “impetu potius sui doloris, quam maturo consilio circa mutationem vestium vidualium in monasticas.”

This brief is dated the 7th December, 1525.

She remained with the sisters of San Silvestro till the autumn of the following year; and would have further deferred returning into a world which the conditions of the times made less than ever tempting to her, had not her brother Ascanio, now her only remaining natural protector, taken her from the convent to Marino, in consequence of the Colonna clan being once again at war with the Pope, as partisans of the Emperor.

On the 20th of September, 1526, this ever turbulent family raised a tumult in Rome to the cry of “Imperio! Imperio! Libertà! Libertà! Colonna! Colonna!” and sacked the Vatican, and every house belonging to the Orsini;* the old clan hatred showing itself as usual on every pretext and opportunity.

The result was a papal decree, depriving Cardinal Colonna of his hat; and declaring confiscated all the estates of the family. Deeply grieved by all these excesses, both by the lawless violence of her kinsmen, and by the punishment incurred by them, she left Marino, and once more returned to the retirement of Ischia in the beginning of 1527. It was well for her that she had decided on not remaining in or near Rome during that fatal year. While the eternal city and its neighbourhood were exposed to the untold horrors and atrocities committed by the soldiers of the Most

* Contemporary copy of the Act of Accusation, cited by Visconti, p. ci.

Catholic King, Vittoria was safe in her island home, torn indeed to the heart by the tidings which reached her of the ruin and dispersion of many valued friends, but at least tranquil and secure.

And now, if not perhaps while she was still with the nuns of San Silvestro, began her life as a poetess. She had hitherto written but little, and occasionally only. Henceforward, poetical composition seems to have made the great occupation of her life. Visconti, the latest, and by far the best editor of her works, has divided them into two portions. With two or three unimportant exceptions, of which the letter to her husband already noticed is the most considerable, they consist entirely of sonnets. The first of Signor Visconti's divisions, comprising 134 sonnets, includes those inspired almost entirely by her grief for the loss of her husband. They form a nearly uninterrupted series "In Memoriam," in which the changes are rung with infinite ingenuity on a very limited number of ideas, all turning on the glory and high qualities of him whom she had lost, and her own undiminished and hopeless misery.

"I only write to vent that inward pain,
On which my heart doth feed itself, nor wills
Aught other nourishment,"

begins the first of these elegiac sonnets; in which she goes on to disclaim any idea of increasing her husband's glory,—"*non per giunger lume al mio bel sole;*" which is the phrase she uses invariably to designate him. This fancy of alluding to Pescara always by the same not very happily chosen metaphor, contributes an additional element of monotony to verses still further deprived of variety by the identity of their highly artificial form.

This form, it is hardly necessary to remark, more than any other mode of the lyre, needs and exhibits the beauties of accurate finish and neat polish. Shut out, as it is, by its exceeding artificiality and difficult construction from many of the higher beauties of more spontaneous poetical utterance, the sonnet, "totus, teres atque rotundus," is nothing if not elaborated to gem-like perfection.

Yet Vittoria writes as follows :—

" Se in man prender non soglio unqua la lima
 Del buon giudicio, e ricercando intorno
 Con occhio disdegnoso, io non adorno
 Ne tergo la mia rozza incolta rima,
 Nasce perchè non è mia cura prima
 Procacciar di ciò lode, o fuggir scorno ;
 Nè che dopo il mio lieto al ciel ritorno
 Viva ella al mondo in più onorata stima.
 Ma dal foco divin, che 'l mio intelletto
 Sua mercè infiamma, convien che escan fuore
 Mal mio grado talor queste faville.
 E se alcuna di loro un gentil core
 Avvien che scaldi, mille volte e mille
 Ringraziar debbo il mio felice errore."

Which may be thus Englished with tolerable accuracy of meaning, if not with much poetical elegance.*

" If in these rude and artless songs of mine
 I never take the file in hand, nor try
 With curious care, and nice fastidious eye,
 To deck and polish each uncultured line,
 'Tis that it makes small portion of my aim
 To merit praise, or 'scape scorn's blighting breath ;
 Or that my verse, when I have welcomed death,
 May live rewarded with the meed of fame.
 But it must be that Heaven's own gracious gift,
 Which with its breath divine inspires my soul,
 Strike forth these sparks, unbidden by my will.
 And should one such but haply serve to lift
 One gentle heart, I thankful reach my goal,
 And, faulty tho' the strain, my every wish fulfil."

* See Note 3.

Again, in another sonnet, of which the first eight lines are perhaps as favourable a specimen of a really poetical image as can be found throughout her writings, she repeats the same profession of "pouring an unpremeditated lay."

"Qual digiuno augellin, che vede ed ode
 Batter l' ali alla madre intorno, quando
 Gli reca il nutrimento ; ond egli amando
 Il cibo e quella, si rallegra e gode,
 E dentro àl nido suo si strugge e rode
 Per desio di seguirla anch' ei volando,
 E la ringrazia in tal modo cantando,
 Che par ch' oltre 'l poter la lingua snode ;
 Tal' io qualor il caldo raggio e vivo
 Del divin sole, onde nutrisco il core
 Più del usato lucido lampeggia,
 Muovo la penna, spinta dall' amore
 Interno ; e senza ch' io stessa m' avveggia
 Di quel ch' io dico le sue lodi scrivo."

Which in English runs pretty exactly as follows :—

"Like to a hungry nestling bird, that hears
 And sees the fluttering of his mother's wings
 Bearing him food, whence, loving what she brings
 And her no less, a joyful mien he wears,
 And struggles in the nest, and vainly stirs,
 Wishful to follow her free wanderings,
 And thanks her in such fashion, while he sings,
 That the free voice beyond his strength appears ;
 So I, whene'er the warm and living glow
 Of him my sun divine, that feeds my heart,
 Shine's brighter than its wont, take up the pen,
 Urged by the force of my deep love ; and so
 Unconscious of the words unkempt by art
 I write his praises o'er and o'er again."

The reader conversant with Italian poetry will have already seen enough to make him aware, that the Colonna's compositions are by no means, unkempt, unpolished, or spontaneous. The merit of them con-

sists in the high degree, to which they are exactly the reverse of all this. They are ingenious, neat, highly studied, elegant, and elaborate. It may be true, indeed, that much thought was not expended on the subject matter; but it was not spared on the diction, versification, and form. So much so, that many of her sonnets were retouched, altered, improved, and finally left to posterity, in a form very different from that in which they were first handed round the literary world of Italy.* The file in truth was constantly in hand; though the nice fastidious care bestowed in dressing out with curious conceits a jejune or trite thought, which won the enthusiastic applause of her contemporaries, does not to the modern reader compensate for the absence of passion, earnestness, and reality.

Then, again, the declaration of the songstress of these would-be "wood notes wild," that they make no pretension to the meed of praise, nor care to escape contempt, nor are inspired by any hope of a life of fame after the author's death, leads us to contrast with such professions the destiny that really did,—surely not altogether unsought,—await these grief-inspired utterances of a breaking heart during the author's lifetime.

No sooner was each memory-born pang illustrated by an ingenious metaphor, or pretty simile packed neatly in its regulation case of fourteen lines with their complexity of twofold rhymes all right, than it was handed all over Italy. Copies were as eagerly sought for as *the* novel of the season at a nineteenth-century circulating library. Cardinals, bishops, poets, wits, diplomatists, passed them from one to another, made them the subject of their correspondence with each

* See advertisement "ai lettori" of Rinaldo's Corso's edition of the sonnet. Venice, 1558.

other, and with the fair mourner ; and eagerly looked out for the next poetical *bonnebouche* which her undying grief and constancy to her “*bel sole*” should send them.

The enthusiasm created by these tuneful wailings of a young widow as lovely as inconsolable, as irreproachable as noble, learned enough to correspond with the most learned men of the day on their own subjects, and with all this a *Colonna*, was intense. *Vittoria* became speedily the most famous woman of her day, was termed by universal consent “the divine,” and lived to see three editions of the grief-cries, which escaped from her “without her will.”

Here is a sonnet, which was probably written at the time of her return to *Ischia* in 1527 ; when the sight of all the well-loved scenery of the home of her happy years must have brought to her mind *Dante's*—

“ *Nessun maggior dolore*
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria !”

Vittoria looks back on the happy time as follows:—

“ *Oh ! che tranquillo mar, oh che chiare onde*
Solcava già la mia spalmata barca,
Di ricca e nobil merce adorna e carica,
Con l' aer puro, e con l' aure seconde,
Il ciel, ch'ora i bei vaghi lumi asconde
Porgea serena luce e d' ombra scarca ;
Ahi ! quanto ha da temer chi lieto varca !
Chè non sempre al principio il fin risponde.
Ecco l' empia e volubile fortuna
Scoperse poi l' irata iniqua fronte,
Dal cui furor sì gran procella insorge.
Venti, pioggia, saette insième aduna,
E fiere intorno a divorarmi pronte ;
Ma l' alma ancor la fida stella scorge.”

In English, thus :—

“ On what smooth seas, on what clear waves did sail
 My fresh careenèd bark ! what costly freight
 Of noble merchandise adorn'd its state !
 How pure the breeze, how favouring the gale !
 And Heaven, which now its beauteous rays doth veil,
 Shone then serene and shadowless. But fate
 For the too happy voyager lies in wait.
 Oft fair beginnings in their endings fail.
 And now doth impious changeful fortune bare
 Her angry ruthless brow, whose threat'ning power
 Rouses the tempest, and lets loose its war !
 But though rains, winds, and lightnings fill the air,
 And wild beasts seek to rend me and devour,
 Still shines o'er my true soul its faithful star.”

Bearing in mind what we have seen of Pescara, it would seem evident, that some monstrous illusion with respect to him must have obscured Vittoria's mind and judgment. It might have been expected that she would have been found attributing to him high and noble qualities, which existed only in her own imagination. But it is remarkable that, though in general terms she speaks of him as all that was noblest and greatest, yet in describing his merits, she confines herself to the few which he really had. This highly cultured, devout, thoughtful, intellectual woman, seems really to have believed, that a mercenary swordsman's calling was the noblest occupation earth could offer, and the successful following of it the best preparation and surest title to immortal happiness hereafter.

The following sonnet is one of many expressing the same sentiments.

“ Alle Vittorie tue, mio lume eterno,
 Non diede il tempo o la stagion favore ;
 La spada, la virtù, l'invitto core
 Fur li ministri tuoi la state e' verno.
 Col prudente occhio, e col saggio governo

L' altrui forze spezzasti in sì brev' ore,
 Che 'l modo all' alte imprese accrebbe onore
 Non men che l'opre al tuo valore interno.
 Non tardaro il tuo corso animi altieri,
 O fiumi, o monti; e le maggior cittadi
 Per cortesia od ardir rimaser vinte.
 Salisti al mondo i più pregiati gradi;
 Or godi in ciel d'altri trionfi e veri,
 D' altre frondi le tempie ornate e cinte."

Which may be Englished as follows:—

"To thy great victories, my eternal light,
 Nor time, nor seasons, lent their favouring aid;
 Thy sword, thy might, thy courage undismay'd,
 Summer and winter serv'd thy will aright.
 By thy wise governance and eagle-sight,
 Thou didst so rout the foe with headlong speed,
 The manner of the doing crown'd the deed,
 No less than did the deed display thy might.
 Mountains and streams, and haughty souls in vain
 Would check thy course. By force of courtesy
 Or valour vanquish'd, cities of name were won.
 Earth's highest honours did thy worth attain;
 Now truer triumphs Heaven reserves for thee,
 And nobler garlands do thy temples crown."

Often her wishes for death are checked by the consideration, that haply her virtue may not suffice to enable her to rejoin her husband in the mansions of the blest. Take the following example:—

"Quando del suo tormento il cor si duole
 Sì ch' io bramo il mio fin, timor m' assale,
 E dice; il morir tosto a che ti vale
 Sì forse lungi vai dal tuo bel sole?
 Da questa fredda tema nascer suole
 Un caldo ardir, che pon d' intorno l' ale
 All alma; onde disgombrà il mio mortale
 Quanto ella può, da quel ch' l mondo vuole.
 Così lo spirto mio s' asconde e copre
 Qui dal piacer uman, non già per fama
 O van grido, o pregiar troppo se stesso;
 Ms sente 'l lume suo, che ognor lo chiama,
 E vede il volto, ovunque mira, impresso,
 Che gli misura i passi e scorge l'opre."

Thus done into English :—

“ When of its pangs my heart doth sore complain,
 So that I long to die, fear falls on me,
 And saith, what boots such early death to thee,
 If far from thy bright sun thou should'st remain.
 Then oft from this cold fear is born again
 A fervent boldness, which doth presently
 Lend my soul wings, so that mortality
 Strives to put off its worldly wishes vain.
 For this, my spirit here herself enfolds,
 And hides from human joys ; and not for fame,
 Nor empty praise, nor overblown conceit ;
 But that she hears her sun still call her name,
 And still, where'er she looks, his face doth meet,
 Who measures all her steps, and all her deeds beholds.”

A similar cast of thought, both as regards her own disgust of life and the halo of sanctity, which by some mysterious process of mind she was able to throw around her husband's memory, is found again in this, the last of the sonnets, selected to illustrate this phase of our poetess's mind, and exemplify the first division of her writings.

“ Cara union, che in sì mirabil modo
 Fosti ordinata dal signor del cielo,
 Che lo spirto divino, e l'uman velo
 Legò con dolce ed amoroso nodo,
 Io, benchi lui di sì bell' opra lodo,
 Pur cerco, e ad altri il mio pensier non celo,
 Sciorre il tuo laccio ; òni più a caldo o gelo
 Serbarti ; poi che qui di te non godo.
 Che l' alma chiusa in questo carcer rio
 Come nemico l'odia ; onde smarrita
 Ne vive qui, nè vola ove desia.
 Quando sarà con suo gran sole unita,
 Felice giorno ! allor contenta fia ;
 Che sol nel viver suo conobbe vita.”

Of which the subjoined rendering, prosaic and crabbed as it is, is perhaps hardly more so than the original.

"Sweet bond, that wast ordain'd so wondrous well
 By the Almighty ruler of the sky,
 Who did unite in one sweet loving tie
 The godlike spirit and its fleshy shell,
 I, while I praise his loving work, yet try—
 Nor wish my thought from others to withhold—
 To loose thy knot ; nor more, through heat or cold,
 Preserve thee, since in thee no joy have I.
 Therefore my soul, shut in this dungeon stern,
 Detests it as a foe ; whence, all astray,
 She lives not here, nor flies where she would go.
 When to her glorious sun she shall return,
 Ah ! then content shall come with that blest day,
 For she, but while he liv'd, a sense of life could know."

In considering the collection of 117 sonnets, from which the above specimens have been selected, and which were probably the product of about seven or eight years, from 1526 to 1533—4 (in one she laments that the seventh year from her husband's death should have brought with it no alleviation of her grief); the most interesting question that suggests itself, is,—whether we are to suppose the sentiments expressed in them to be genuine outpourings of the heart, or rather to consider them all as part of the professional equipment of a poet, earnest only in the work of achieving a high and brilliant poetical reputation? The question is a prominent one, as regards the concrete notion to be formed of the sixteenth-century woman, Vittoria Colonna; and is not without interest as bearing on the great subject of woman's nature.

Vittoria's moral conduct, both as a wife and as a widow, was wholly irreproachable. A mass of concurrent contemporary testimony seems to leave no doubt whatever on this point. More than one of the poets of her day professed themselves her ardent admirers, devoted slaves, and despairing lovers, according to the most approved poetical and Platonic fashion of the

time; and she received their inflated bombast not displeased with the incense, and answered them with other bombast, all *en règle* and in character. The "carte de tendre" was then laid down on the Platonic projection; and the sixteenth century fashion in this respect was made a convenient screen, for those to whom a screen was needful, quite as frequently as the less classical whimsies of a later period. But Platonic love to Vittoria was merely an occasion for indulging in the spiritualistic pedantries, by which the classicists of that day sought to link the infant metaphysical speculations then beginning to grow out of questions of church doctrine, with the ever-interesting subject of romantic love.

A recent French writer,* having translated into prose Vittoria's poetical epistle to her husband, adds that she has been "obliged to veil and soften certain passages which might damage the writer's poetical character in the eyes of her fair readers, by exhibiting her as more woman than poet in the ardent and 'positive' manner, in which she speaks of her love." Never was there a more calumnious insinuation. It is true indeed that the Frenchwoman omits, or slurs over some passages of the original, but as they are wholly void of the shadow of offence, it can only be supposed that the translator did not understand the meaning of them.

There is no word in Vittoria's poetry which can lead to any other conclusion on this point, than that she was, in her position and social rank, an example, rare at that period, not only of perfect regularity of conduct, but of great purity and considerable elevation of mind.

* Madame Lamaze, *Études sur Trois Femmes Célèbres*; Paris, 1848, p. 41.

Such other indications as we have of her moral nature are all favourable. We find her, uninfluenced by the bitter hereditary hatreds of her family, striving to act as peacemaker between hostile factions, and weeping over the mischiefs occasioned by their struggles. We find her the constant correspondent and valued friend of almost every good and great man of her day. And if her scheme of moral doctrine, as gatherable from that portion of her poems which we have not yet examined, be narrow,—as how should it be otherwise,—yet it is expressive of a mind habitually under the influence of virtuous aspiration, and is more humanising in its tendencies, than that generally prevalent around her.

Such was Vittoria Colonna. It has been seen what her husband Pescara was. And the question arises,—how far can it be imagined possible that she should not only have lavished on him to the last while living, all the treasures of an almost idolatrous affection; not only have looked back on his memory after his death with fondness and charitable, even blindly charitable, indulgence; but should absolutely have so canonised him in her imagination as to have doubted of her own fitness to consort hereafter with a soul so holy! It may be said, that Vittoria did not know her husband as we know him; that the few years they had passed together had no doubt shown her only the better phases of his character. But she knew that he had at least doubted whether he should not be false to his sovereign, and had been most infamously so to his accomplices or dupes. She knew at least all that Giovio's narrative could tell her; for the bishop presented it to her, and received a sonnet in return.

But it is one of the most beautiful properties of

woman's nature, some men say, that their love has power to blind their judgment. Novelists and poets are fond of representing women whose affections remain unalterably fixed on their object, despite the manifest unworthiness of it; and set such examples before us, as something high, noble, admirable, "beautiful;" to the considerable demoralisation of their confiding students of either sex. There is a tendency in woman to refuse at all risks the dethroning of the sovereign she has placed on her heart's throne. The pain of deposing him is so great, that she is tempted to abase her own soul to escape it; for it is only at that cost that it can be escaped. And the spectacle of a fine nature "dragged down to sympathise with clay," is not "beautiful," but exceedingly the reverse. Men do not usually set forth as worthy of admiration—though a certain school of writers do even this, in the trash talked of love at first sight—that kind of love between the sexes, which arises from causes wholly independent of the higher part of our nature. Yet it is that love alone which can survive esteem. And it is highly important to the destinies of woman, that she should understand and be thoroughly persuaded, that she cannot love that which does not merit love, without degrading her own nature; that under whatsoever circumstances love should cease when respect, approbation, and esteem have come to an end; and that those who find poetry and beauty in the love which no moral change in its object can kill, are simply teaching her to attribute a fatally debasing supremacy to those lower instincts of our nature, on whose due subordination to the diviner portion of our being all nobleness, all moral purity and spiritual progress depends.

Vittoria Colonna was not one whose intellectual and

moral self had thus abdicated its sceptre. The texture of her mind and its habits of thought forbid the supposition; and, bearing this in mind, it becomes wholly impossible to accept the glorification of her "bel sole," which makes the staple of the first half of her poems, as the sincere expression of genuine feeling and opinion.

She was probably about as much in earnest as was her great model and master, Petrarch, in his adoration of Laura. The poetical mode of the day was almost exclusively Petrarchist; and the abounding Castalian fount of that half century in "the land of song" played from its thousand jets little else than Petrarch and water in different degrees of dilution. Vittoria has no claim to be excepted from the "servum pecus," though her imitation has more of self-derived vigour to support it. And this assumption of a mighty, undying, exalted and hopeless passion, was a necessary part of the poet's professional appurtenances. Where could a young and beautiful widow, of unblemished conduct, who had no intention of changing her condition, and no desire to risk misconstruction by the world, find this needful part of her outfit as a poet, so unobjectionably as in the memory of her husband, sanctified and exalted by the imagination to the point proper for the purpose.

For want of a deeper spiritual insight, and a larger comprehension of the finer affections of the human heart and the manifestations of them, with the Italian poets of the "rénaissance," love-poetry was little else than the expression of passion in the most restricted sense of the term. But they were often desirous of elevating, purifying, and spiritualising their theme. And how was this to be accomplished? The gratification

of passion, such as they painted, would, they felt, have led them quite in a different direction from that they were seeking. A hopeless passion therefore, one whose wishes the reader was perfectly to understand were never destined to be gratified—better still, one by the nature of things impossible to be gratified—this was the contrivance by which love was to be poetised and moralised.

The passion-poetry, which addressed itself to the memory of one no more, met the requirements of the case exactly; and Vittoria's ten years despair and lamentations, her apotheosis of the late cavalry captain, and longing to rejoin him, must be regarded as poetical properties brought out for use, when she sat down to make poetry for the perfectly self-conscious, though very laudable purpose of acquiring for herself a poet's reputation.

But it must not be supposed that anything in the nature of hypocrisy was involved in the assumption of the poetical rôle of inconsolable widow. Everybody understood that the poetess was only making poetry, and saying the usual and proper things for that purpose. She was no more attempting to impose on anybody than was a poet when on entering some "academia" he termed himself *Tyrtæus* or *Lycidas*, instead of the name inherited from his father.

And from this prevailing absence of all real and genuine feeling, arises the utter coldness and shallow insipidity of the poets of that time and school. Literature has probably few more unreadable departments than the productions of the Petrarchists of the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Vittoria, when she began to write on religious subjects, was more in earnest; and the result, as we shall see, is accordingly improved.

CHAPTER VI.

Vittoria in Rome in 1530.—Antiquarian rambles.—Pyramus and Thisbe medal.—Contemporary commentary on Vittoria's poems.—Paul the Third.—Rome again in 1536.—Visit to Lucca.—To Ferrara.—Protestant tendencies.—Invitation from Giberto.—Return to Rome.

THE noble rivalry of Francis I. and Charles V. was again, in 1530, making Naples a field of glory in such sort, that outraged nature appeared also on the scene with pestilence in her hand. The first infliction had driven most of the literary society in Naples to take refuge in the comparative security of Ischia. The latter calamity had reached even that retreat; and Vittoria some time in that year again visited Rome.

Life was beginning there to return to its usual conditions after the tremendous catastrophe of 1527. Pestilence had there also, as usual, followed in the train of war and military license. And many in all classes had been its victims. Great numbers fled from the city, and among these were probably most of such as were honoured by Vittoria's personal friendship. Now they were venturing back to their old haunts on the Pincian, the Quirinal, or those favourite Colonna gardens, still ornamented by the ruins of Aurelian's Temple to the Sun. The tide of modern Goths, who had threatened to make the eternal city's name a mockery, had been swept back at the word of that second and "most Catholic" Alaric, Charles V. Car-

dinals, poetasters, wits, Ciceronian bishops, statesmen, ambassadors, and artists, busy in the achievement of immortality, were once more forming a society, which gave the Rome of that day a fair title to be considered, in some points of view, the capital of the world. The golden Roman sunlight was still glowing over aqueduct, arch and temple; and Rome the Eternal was herself again.

By this varied and distinguished society Vittoria was received with open arms. The Colonna family had become reconciled to Pope Clement, and had had their fiefs restored to them; so that there was no cloud on the political horizon to prevent the celebrated Marchesana from receiving the homage of all parties. The Marchese del Vasto, Vittoria's former pupil, for whom she never ceased to feel the warmest affection, was also then at Rome.* In his company, and that of some others of the gifted knot around her, Vittoria visited the ruins and vestiges of ancient Rome with all the enthusiasm of one deeply versed in classic lore, and thoroughly imbued with the then prevailing admiration for the works and memorials of Pagan antiquity. Vittoria's sister-in-law, Donna Giovanna d'Aragona, the beautiful and accomplished wife of her brother Ascanio, in whose house she seems to have been living during this visit to Rome, was doubtless one of the party on these occasions. The poet Molza has chronicled his presence among them in more than one sonnet. His muse would seem to have "made increment of anything." For no less than four sonnets † were the result of the exclamation from Vittoria, "Ah happy they"—the ancients, "who lived in days so full

* *Lettere di Bembo* vol. i. p. 115, ed. 1560.

† *Edit.*, Serassi pp. 14, 15, 37, 40.

of beauty!" Of course, various pretty things were obtainable out of this. Among others, we have the gallant Pagans responding to the lady's ejaculation, that on the contrary their time was less fortunate than the present, in that it was not blessed by the sight of her.

It would have been preferable to have had preserved for us some further scraps from the lips of Vittoria, while the little party gazed at sunset over that matchless view of the aqueduct-bestridden Campagna from the terrace at the western front of the Lateran, looked up at the Colosseum, ghostly in the moonlight, from the arch of Titus, or discoursed on the marvellous proportions of the Pantheon.

But history rarely guesses aright what the after-ages she works for would most thank her for handing down to them. And we must be content to construct for ourselves, as best we may, from the stray hints we have, the singularly pleasing picture of these sixteenth century rambles among the ruins of Rome by as remarkable a company of pilgrims as any of the thousands who have since trodden in their steps.

Vittoria's visit to Rome upon this occasion was a short one. It was probably early in the following year that she returned to Ischia. Signor Visconti attributes this journey to the restlessness arising from a heart ill at ease, vainly hoping to find relief from its misery by change of place. He assumes all the expressions of despair to be found in her sonnets of this period, to be so many reliable autobiographical documents, and builds his narrative upon them accordingly. To this period he attributes the sonnet, translated in a previous chapter, in which the poetess declares that she has no wish to conceal from the world the tempta-

tion to suicide which assails her. And in commemoration of this mood of mind, he adds, in further proof of the sad truth, a medal was struck upon this occasion, in Rome, of which he gives an engraving. It represents, on one side, the inconsolable lady as a handsome, well nourished, comfortable-looking widow, in mourning weeds, more aged in appearance, certainly, since the striking of the former medal spoken of, than the lapse of seven years would seem sufficient to account for. And, on the reverse, is a representation of the melancholy story of Pyramus and Thisbe, the former lying dead at the feet of the typical paragon, who is pointing towards her breast a sword, grasped in both hands, half-way down the blade, in a manner sure to have cut her fingers. The two sides of the medal, seen at one glance, as in Signor Visconti's engraving, are, it must be admitted, calculated to give rise to ideas the reverse of pathetic.

To this period too belongs the sonnet, also previously alluded to, in which Vittoria speaks of the seventh year of her bereavement having arrived, without bringing with it any mitigation of her woe. Signor Visconti takes this for simple autobiographical material. It is curious, as a specimen of the modes of thought at the time, to see how the same passage is handled by Vittoria's first editor and commentator, Rinaldo Corsi, who published her works for the second time at Venice in 1558. His commentary begins as follows:—"On this sonnet, it remains for me to speak of the number Seven as I have done already of the number Four. But since Varro, Macrobius, and Aulus Gellius, together with many others, have treated largely of the subject, I will only add this,—which, perhaps, Ladies, may appear to you somewhat strange ;

that, according to Hippocrates, the number four enters twice into the number seven; and I find it stated by most credible authors as a certain fact, and proved by the testimony of their own observation, that a male child of seven years old has been known to cure persons afflicted by the infirmity called scrofula by no other means than by the hidden virtue of that number seven," &c., &c., &c.

In this sort, Messer Rinaldo Corso composed, and the literary ladies, to whom throughout, as in the above passage, his labours are especially dedicated, must be supposed to have read more than five hundred close-printed pages of commentary on the works of the celebrated poetess, who, in all probability, when she penned the sonnet in question, had no more intention of setting forth the reasons for her return to Ischia, than she had of alluding to the occult properties of the mysterious number seven. The natural supposition is, that as she had been driven from her home by the pestilence, she returned to it when that reason for absence was at an end.

There she seems to have remained tranquilly employed on her favourite pursuits, increasing her already great reputation, and corresponding assiduously with all the best and most distinguished men of Italy, whether laymen or ecclesiastics, till the year 1536.

In that year she again visited Rome, and resided during her stay there with Donna Giovanna d'Aragona, her sister-in-law. Paul III., Farnese, had in 1534 succeeded Clement in the chair of St. Peter; and though Paul was on many accounts very far from being a good Pope or a good priest, yet the Farnese was an improvement on the Medici. As ever, Rome began to show signs of improvement when

danger to her system from without began to make itself felt. Paul seems very soon to have become convinced that the general council, which had been so haunting a dread to Clement during the whole of his pontificate, could no longer be avoided. But it was still hoped in the council chambers of the Vatican that the doctrinal difficulties of the German reformers, which threatened the Church with so fatal a schism, might be got over by conciliation and dexterous theological diplomacy. As soon as it became evident that this hope was vain, fear began to influence the papal policy, and at its bidding the ferocious persecuting bigotry of Paul IV. was contrasted with the shameless profligacy of Alexander, the epicurean indifferentism of Leo, and the pettifogging worldliness of Clement.

Between these two periods came Paul III., and the illusory hopes that the crisis might be tided over by finding some arrangement of terminology, which should satisfy the reformers, while Rome should abandon no particle of doctrine on which any vital portion of her system of temporal power was based. To meet the exigencies of this period, Paul III. signalled his accession by raising to the purple a number of the most earnest, most learned, and truly devout men in Italy. Contarini, the Venetian; Caraffa, from Naples; Sadoleto, Bishop of Carpentras; Pole, then a fugitive from England; Giberti, Bishop of Verona; and Fregoso, Archbishop of Salerno, were men chosen solely on account of their eminent merit.

With most, if not all of these, Vittoria was connected by the bonds of intimate friendship. With Contarini, Sadoleto, and Pole, especially, she corresponded; and the esteem felt for her by such men is the most undeniable testimony to the genuine worth of

her character. It is easy to imagine, therefore, how warm a reception awaited her arrival on this occasion in Rome, and how delightful must have been her stay there. She had now reached the full measure of her reputation. The religious and doctrinal topics which were now occupying the best minds in Italy, and on which her thoughts were frequently busied in her correspondence with such men as those named above, had recently begun to form the subject-matter of her poems. And their superiority in vigour and earnestness to her earlier works must have been perfectly apparent to her reverend and learned friends.

Accordingly we are told that her stay in Rome on this occasion was a continued ovation; and Signor Visconti informs us, on the authority of the Neapolitan historian Gregorio Rosso, that Charles V. being then in Rome "condescended to visit in their own house the ladies Giovanna di Aragona, wife of Ascanio Colonna, and Vittoria Colonna, Marchesa di Pescara."

The following year, 1537 that is, she went, Visconti says, to Lucca, from which city she passed to Ferrara, arriving there on the 8th of April "in humble guise, with six waiting women only."* Ercole d'Este, the second of the name, was then the reigning duke, having succeeded to his father Alphonso in 1534. And the court of Ferrara, which had been for several years pre-eminent among the principalities of Italy for its love of literature and its patronage of literary men, became yet more notably so in consequence of the marriage of Hercules II. with Renée of France, the daughter of Louis XII. The Protestant tendencies and sympathies of this Princess had rendered Ferrara also the resort,

* Mem. per la St. di Ferrara. di Antonio Frizzi, vol. iv. p. 333.

and in some instances the refuge, of many professors and favourers of the new ideas which were beginning to stir the mind of Italy. And though Vittoria's orthodox Catholic biographers are above all things anxious to clear her from all suspicion of having ever held opinions eventually condemned by the Church, there is every reason to believe that her journey to Ferrara was prompted by the wish to exchange ideas upon these subjects with some of those leading minds which were known to have imbibed Protestant tendencies, if not to have acquired fully formed Protestant convictions. It is abundantly clear, from the character of her friendships, from her correspondence, and from the tone of her poetry at this period, and during the remainder of her life, that her mind was absorbingly occupied with topics of this nature. And the short examination of the latter division of her works, which it is proposed to attempt in the next chapter, will probably convince such as have no partisan Catholic feelings on the subject, that Vittoria's mind had made very considerable progress in the Protestant direction.

No reason is assigned for her stay at Lucca. Visconti, with unusual brevity and dryness, merely states that she visited that city.* And it is probable that he has not been able to discover any documents directly accounting for the motives of her visit. But he forbears to mention that the new opinions had gained so much ground there that that Republic was very near declaring Protestantism the religion of their state. After her totally unaccounted-for visit to the heresy-stricken city, she proceeds to another almost equally tainted with suspicion.

* Vita, p. cxiii.

It is no doubt perfectly true that Duke Hercules and his court received her with every possible distinction on the score of her poetical celebrity, and deemed his city honoured by her presence. He invited, we are told, the most distinguished poets and men of letters of Venice and Lombardy to meet her at Ferrara. And so much was her visit prized that when Cardinal Giberto sent thither his secretary, Francesco della Torre, to persuade her to visit his episcopal city Verona, that ambassador wrote to his friend Bembo, at Venice, that he "had like to have been banished by the Duke, and stoned by the people for coming there with the intention of robbing Ferrara of its most precious treasure, for the purpose of enriching Verona." Vittoria, however, seems to have held out some hope that she might be induced to visit Verona. For the secretary, continuing his letter to the literary Venetian cardinal, says, "Who knows but what we may succeed in making reprisal on them? And if that should come to pass, I should hope to see your Lordship more frequently in Verona, as I should see Verona the most honoured as well as thè most envied city in Italy."*

It is impossible to have more striking testimony to the fame our poetess had achieved by her pen; and it is a feature of the age and clime well worth noting, that a number of small states, divided by hostilities and torn by warfare, should have, nevertheless, possessed among them a republic of letters capable of conferring a celebrity so cordially acknowledged throughout the whole extent of Italy.

From a letter † written by Vittoria to Giangiorgio

* Letter dated 11th September 1537, from Bembo's Correspondence cited by Visconti, p. cxv.

† Visconti, p. cxiv.

Trissino of Vicenza, the author of an almost forgotten epic, entitled "Italia liberata da Goti," bearing date the 10th of January (1537), we learn that she found the climate of Ferrara "unfavourable to her indisposition;" which would seem to imply a continuance of ill-health. Yet it was at this time that she conceived the idea of undertaking a journey to the Holy Land.* Her old pupil, and nearly life-long friend, the Marchese del Vasto, came from Milan to Ferrara, to dissuade her from the project. And with this view, as well as to remove her from the air of Ferrara, he induced her to return to Rome, where her arrival was again made a matter of almost public rejoicing.

The date of this journey was probably about the end of 1537. The society of the Eternal City, especially of that particular section of it which made the the world of Vittoria, was in a happy and hopeful mood. The excellent Contarini had not yet departed † thence on his mission of conciliation to the Conference, which had been arranged with the Protestant leaders at Ratisbon. The brightest and most cheering hopes were based on a total misconception of the nature, or rather on an entire ignorance of the existence of that under current of social change, which, to the north of the Alps, made the reformatory movement something infinitely greater, more fruitful of vast results, and more inevitable, than any scholastic dispute on points of theologic doctrine. And at the time of Vittoria's arrival, that little band of pure, amiable, and high-minded, but not large-minded men, who fondly hoped that, by the amendment of some practical abuses, and

* Visconti, p. cxvi.

† He left Rome 11th November, 1538. Letter from Contarini to Pole, cited by Ranke. Austin's transl., vol. i. p. 152.

a mutually forbearing give-and-take arrangement of some nice questions of metaphysical theology, peace on earth and good-will among men, might be yet made compatible with the undiminished pretensions and theory of an universal and infallible Church, were still lapped in the happiness of their day-dream. Of this knot of excellent men, which comprised all that was best, most amiable, and most learned in Italy, Vittoria was the disciple, the friend, and the inspired Muse. The short examination of her religious poetry, therefore, which will be the subject of the next chapter, will not only open to us the deepest and most earnest part of her own mind, but will, in a measure, illustrate the extent and nature of the Protestantising tendencies then manifesting themselves in Italy.

CHAPTER VII.

Oratory of Divine Love.—Italian reformers.—Their tenets.—Consequence of the doctrine of justification by faith.—Fear of schism in Italy.—Orthodoxy of Vittoria questioned.—Proofs of her Protestantism from her writings.—Calvinism of her sonnets.—Remarkable passage against auricular confession.—Controversial and religious sonnets.—Absence from the sonnets of moral topics.—Specimen of her poetical power.—Romanist ideas.—Absence from the sonnets of all patriotic feeling.

THE extreme corruption of the Italian church, and in some degree also the influence of German thought, had even as early as the Pontificate of Leo X., led several of the better minds in Italy to desire ardently some means of religious reform. A contemporary writer cited by Ranke,* tells us that in Leo's time some fifty or sixty earnest and pious men formed themselves into a society at Rome, which they called the "Oratory of Divine Love," and strove by example and preaching to stem as much as in them lay the tide of profligacy and infidelity. Among these men were Contarini, the learned and saint-like Venetian, Sadolet, Giberto, Caraffa (a man, who however earnest in his piety, showed himself at a later period, when he became pope as Paul IV., to be animated with a very different spirit from that of most of his fellow religionists), Gaetano, Thiene, who was afterwards

* Caracciolo, *Vita di Paolo 4*, MS. Ranke, *Popes*, vol. i. p. 136, edit. cit.

canonised, etc. But in almost every part of Italy, not less than in Rome, there were men of the same stamp, who carried the new ideas to greater or lesser lengths, were the objects of more or less ecclesiastical censure and persecution; and who died, some reconciled to, and some excommunicated by the Church they so vainly strove to amend.

In Naples, Juan Valdez, a Spaniard, Secretary to the Viceroy, warmly embraced the new doctrines; and being a man much beloved, and of great influence, he drew many converts to the cause. It was a pupil and friend of his, whose name it has been vainly sought to ascertain, who composed the celebrated treatise, "On the Benefits of the Death of Christ," which was circulated in immense numbers over the whole of Italy, and exercised a very powerful influence. A little later, when the time of inquisitorial persecution came, this book was so vigorously proscribed, sought out and destroyed, that despite the vast number of copies which must have existed in every corner of Italy, it has utterly disappeared, and not one is known to be in existence.* It is impossible to have a more striking proof of the violent and searching nature of the persecution under Paul IV. Another friend of Valdez, who was also intimate with Vittoria, was Marco Flaminio, who revised the treatise "On the Benefits of Christ's Death."

In Modena, the Bishop Morone, the intimate friend of Pole and Contarini, and his chaplain, Don Girolamo de Modena, supported and taught the same opinions.

In Venice, Gregorio Cortese, Abbot of San Giorgio Maggiore, Luigi Priuli, a patrician, and the Benedic-

* Ranke. ed. cit., vol. i. p. 217.

tine Marco, of Padua, formed a society mainly occupied in discussing the subtle questions which formed the "symbolum" of the new party.

"If we enquire," says Ranke,* "what was the faith which chiefly inspired these men, we shall find that the main article of it was that same doctrine of justification, which, as preached by Luther, had given rise to the whole Protestant movement."

The reader fortunate enough to be wholly unread in controversial divinity, will yet probably not have escaped hearing of the utterly interminable disputes on justification, free-will, election, faith, good works, prevenient grace, original sin, absolute decrees, and predestination, which, with much of evil, and as yet little good consequence, have occupied the most acute intellects, and most learning-stored brains of Europe for the last three centuries. Without any accurate knowledge of the manner in which the doctrines represented by these familiar terms are dependent on, and necessitated by each other, and of the precise points on which the opposing creeds have fought this eternal battle, he will be aware that the system popularly known as Calvinism, represents the side of the question taken by the reformers of the sixteenth century, while the opposite theory of justification by good works was that held by the orthodox Catholic Church, or unreforming party. And with merely these general ideas to guide him, it will appear strangely unaccountable to find all the best, noblest and purest minds adopting a system which in its simplest logical development inevitably leads to the most debasing demonolatry, and lays the axe to the root of all morality and noble action; while the cor-

* Ed. cit., vol. i. p. 138.

rupt, the worldly, the ambitious, the unspiritual, the unintellectual natures that formed the dominant party, held the opposite opinion apparently so favourable to virtue.

An explanation of this phenomenon by a partisan of either school would probably be long and somewhat intricate. But the matter becomes intelligible enough, and the true key to the wishes and conduct of both parties is found, if, without regarding the moral or theological results of either scheme, or troubling ourselves with the subtleties by which either side sought to meet the objections of the other, we consider simply the bearings of the new doctrines on that ecclesiastical system, which the orthodox and dominant party were determined at all cost to support. If it were admitted that man is justifiable by faith alone, that his election is a matter to be certified to his own heart by the immediate operation of the divine spirit, it would follow that the whole question of his religious condition and future hopes might be, or rather must be, settled between him and his creator alone. And then what would become of ecclesiastical authority and priestly interference? If the only knowledge possible to be attained of any individual's standing before God, were locked in his own breast, what hold can the Church have on him? It is absolutely necessary to any system of spiritual tyranny, that no doctrine should be admitted by virtue of which a layman may tell a priest that despite the opinion he, the priest, may form upon the subject, he, the layman, has the assurance of acceptation before God, by means of evidence of a nature inscrutable to the priest. Once admit this, and the whole foundation of ecclesiastical domination is sapped. Nay, by a very logical and short route,

sure to be soon travelled by those who have made good this first fundamental pretension, they would arrive at the negation and abolition of all priesthood. Preachers and teachers might still have place under such a system, but not priests, or priestly power. To this an externally ascertainable religion is so vitally necessary, that the theory of justification by good works was far from sufficient for the purposes of the Catholic priesthood, as long as good works could be understood to mean a general course of not very accurately measurable virtuous living. This was not sufficient, because though visible not sufficiently tangible, countable, and tariffable. Hence the good works most urgently prescribed, became reduced to that mass of formal practices so well known as the material of Romanist piety, among which, the most valuable for the end in view, are of course those which can only be performed by the intervention of a priest.

But it must not be supposed that all this was as plainly discerned by the combatants in that confused strife as it may be by lookers back on it from a vantage ground three centuries high. The innovators were in all probability few, if any of them, conscious of the extent and importance of the principle they were fighting for. And, on the other hand, there is no reason to attribute an evil consciousness of motives, such as those nakedly set forth above, to the conservative party. The fact that a doctrine would tend to abridge Church power and endanger Church unity, would doubtless have appeared to many a good and conscientious man a sufficient proof of its unsoundness and falsity.

Indeed, even among the reformers in Italy the fear of schism was so great, and the value attached to

Church unity so high, that these considerations probably did as much towards checking and finally extinguishing Protestantism in Italy as did the strong hand of persecution. From the first, many of the most earnest advocates of the new doctrines were by no means prepared to sever themselves from the Church for the sake of their opinions. Some were ready to face such schism and martyrdom also in the cause; as, for instance, Bernardino Ochino, the General of the Capuchins, and the most powerful preacher of his day, who fled from Italy and became a professed Protestant, and Carnesecchi, the Florentine, who was put to death for his heresy at Rome.

But it had not yet become clear how far the new doctrines might be held compatibly with perfect community with the Church of Rome at the time when Vittoria arrived in that city from Ferrara. The conference with the German Protestants, by means of which it was hoped to effect a reconciliation, was then being arranged, and the hopes of Vittoria's friends ran high. When these hopes proved delusive, and when Rome pronounced herself decisively on the doctrines held by the Italian reformers, the most conspicuous friends of Vittoria did not quit the Church. She herself writes ever as its submissive and faithful daughter. But as to her having held opinions which were afterwards declared heretical, and for which others suffered, much of her poetry, written probably about this time, affords evidence so clear that it is wonderful Tiraboschi and her biographers can deem it possible to maintain her orthodoxy.

Take, for example, the following sonnet :

“ Quand' io riguardo il nobil raggio ardente
Della grazia divina, e quel valore

Ch' illustra 'l intelletto, infiamma il core
 Con virtu' sopr' umana, alta, e possente,
 L' alma le voglie allor fisse ed intente
 Raccoglie tutte insième a fargli onore ;
 Ma tanto ha di poter, quant' è 'l favore
 Che dal lume e dal foco intende e sente.
 Ond' ella può ben far certa efficace
 L' alta sua elezion, ma insino al segno
 Ch' all autor d'ogni ben, sua mercè, piace.
 Non sprona il corso nostro industria o ingegno ;
 Quel corre più sicuro e più vivace,
 C' ha dal favor del ciel maggior sostegno."

Thus rendered into English blank verse, with a greater closeness to the sense of the original than might perhaps have been attained in a translation hampered by the necessity of rhyming :

"When I reflect on that bright noble ray
 Of grace divine, and on that mighty power,
 Which clears the intellect, inflames the heart
 With virtue, strong with more than human strength,
 My soul then gathers up her will, intent
 To render to that Power the honour due ;
 But only so much can she, as free grace
 Gives her to feel and know th' inspiring fire.
 Thus can the soul her high election make
 Fruitful and sure ; but only to such point
 As, in his goodness, wills the Fount of good.
 Nor art nor industry can speed her course ;
 He most securely and alertly runs
 Who most by Heaven's free favour is upheld."

The leading points of Calvinistic doctrine could hardly be in the limits of a sonnet more clearly and comprehensively stated. Devotional meditation inclines the heart to God ; but the soul is powerless even to worship, except in such measure as she is enabled to do so by freely-given grace. By this means only can man make sure his election. To strive after virtue is useless to the non-elect, seeing that man can safely

run his course only in proportion as he has received the favour of God.

Again, in the following sonnet will be remarked a tone of thought and style of phrase perfectly congenial to modern devotional feeling of what is termed the evangelical school; while it is assuredly not such as would meet the approval of orthodox members of either the Roman Catholic or Anglo-Catholic churches :

“Quando dal lume, il cui vivo splendore
 Rende il petto fedel lieto e sicuro,
 Si dissolve per grazia il ghiaccio duro,
 Che sovente si gela intorno al core,
 Sento ai bei lampi del possente ardore
 Cader delle mie colpe il manto oscuro,
 E vestirmi in quel punto il chiaro e puro
 Della prima innocenza e primo amore.
 E sebben con serrata e fida chiave
 Serro quel raggio ; egli è scivo e sottile,
 Si ch' un basso pensier lo scaccia e sdegna.
 Ond' ei ratto sen vola ; io mesta e grave
 Rimango, e 'l prego che d' ogni ombra vile
 Mi spogli, acciò più presto a me sen vegna.”

Which may be thus, with tolerable accuracy, rendered into English :

“When by the light, whose living ray both peace
 And joy to faithful bosoms doth impart,
 The indurated ice, around the heart
 So often gather'd, is dissolved through grace,
 Beneath that blessed radiance from above
 Falls from me the dark mantle of my sin ;
 Sudden I stand forth pure and radiant in
 The garb of primal innocence and love.
 And though I strive with lock and trusty key
 To keep that ray, so subtle 'tis and coy,
 By one low thought 'tis scared and put to flight.
 So flies it from me. I in sorrowing plight
 Remain, and pray, that he from base alloy
 May purge me, so the light come sooner back to me.”

Here, in addition to the "points of doctrine" laid down in the previous sonnet, we have that of sudden and instantaneous conversion and sanctification; and that without any aid from sacrament, altar, or priest.

Similar thoughts are again expressed in the next sonnet selected, which in Signor Visconti's edition immediately follows the preceding:

"Spiego per voi, mia luce, indarno l' ale,
 Prima che 'l caldo vostro interno vento
 M' apra l' aere d' intorno, ora ch' io sento
 Vincer da nuovo ardir l'antico male;
 Chè giunga all' infinito opra mortale
 Opra vostra è, Signor, che in un momento
 La può far degna; ch' io da me pavento
 Di cader col pensier quand' ei più sale.
 Bramo quell' invisibil chiaro lume,
 Che fuga densa nebbia; e quell' accesa
 Secreta fiamma, ch' ogni gel consuma.
 Onde poi, sgombra dal terren costume,
 Tutta al divino amor l' anima intesa
 Si mova al volo altero in altra piuma."

Thus done into English:

"Feeling new force to conquer primal sin,
 Yet all in vain I spread my wings to thee,
 My light, until the air around shall be
 Made clear for me by thy warm breath within.
 That mortal works should reach the infinite
 Is thy work, Lord! For in a moment thou
 Canst give them worth. Left to myself I know
 My thought would fall, when at its utmost height.
 I long for that clear radiance from above
 That puts to flight all cloud; and that bright flame
 Which secret burning warms the frozen soul;
 So that set free from every mortal aim,
 And all intent alone on heavenly love,
 She flies with stronger pinion t'wards her goal."

In the following lines, which form the conclusion of a sonnet, in which she has been saying that God does

not permit that any pure heart should be concealed from His all-seeing eye "by the fraud or force of others," we have a very remarkable bit of such heresy on the vital point of the confessional, as has been sufficient to consign more than one victim to the stake :

"Securi del suo dolce e giusto impero,
 Non come il primo padre e la sua donna,
 Dobbiam del nostro error biasimare altrui ;
 Ma con la speme accesa e dolor vero
 Aprir dentro, *passando oltra la gonna*
I falli nostri a solo a sol con lui.

The underlined words, "*passando oltra la gonna*," literally, "passing beyond the gown," though the sense appears to be unmistakable, are yet sufficiently obscure and unobvious, and the phrase sufficiently far-fetched, to lead to the suspicion of a wish on the part of the writer in some degree to veil her meaning. "That in the captain's but a choleric word, which in the soldier is foul blasphemy." And the high-born Colonna lady, the intimate friend of cardinals and princes, might write much with impunity which would have been perilous to less lofty heads. But the sentiment in this very remarkable passage implies an attack on one of Rome's tenderest and sorest points. In English the lines run thus :

"Confiding in His just and gentle sway
 We should not dare, like Adam and his wife,
 On other's backs our proper blame to lay ;
 But with new-kindled hope and unfeigned grief,
Passing by priestly robes, lay bare within
To him alone the secret of our sin."

Again, in the conclusion of another sonnet, in which she has been speaking of the benefits of Christ's death, and of the necessity of a "soprannatural divina fede"

for the receiving of them, she writes in language very similar to that of many a modern advocate of "free inspiration," and which must have been distasteful to the erudite clergy of the dominant hierarchy, as follow:

"Que' ch' avrà sol in lui le luci fisse,
 Non que' ch' intese meglio, o che più lesse
 Volumi in terra, in ciel sarà beato.
 In carta questa legge non si scrisse ;
 Ma con la stampa sua nel cor purgato
 Col foco dell' amor Gesù l' impresse."

In English :

"He who hath fixed on Christ alone his eyes,
 Not he who best hath understood, or read
 Most earthly volumes, shall Heaven's bliss attain.
 For not on paper did He write His law,
 But printed it on expurgated hearts
 Stamped with the fire of Jesus' holy love."

In another remarkable sonnet, she gives expression to the prevailing feeling of the pressing necessity for Church reform, joined to a marked declaration of belief in the doctrine of Papal infallibility; a doctrine, which by its tenacious hold on the Italian mind, contributed mainly to extinguish the sudden straw-blaze of reforming tendencies throughout Italy. The lines run as follows:—

"Veggio d' alga e di fango omai sì carca,
 Pietro, la rete tua, che se qualche onda
 Di fuor l' assale o intorno circonda,
 Potria spezzarsi, e a rischio andar la barca ;
 La qual, non come suol leggiera e scarca,
 Sovra 'l turbato mar corre a seconda,
 Ma in poppa e'n prora, all' una e all' altra sponda
 E' grave sì ch' a gran periglio varca.
 Il tuo buon successor, *ch' alta cagione*
Direttamente elesse, e cor e mano
 Move sovente per condurla a porto.

Ma contra il voler suo ratto s' oppone
 L' altrui malizia ; onde ciascun s' è accorto,
 Ch' egli senza 'l tuo aiuto adopra in vano."

Which may be thus read in English blank verse, giving not very poetically, but with tolerable fidelity, the sense of the original :—

" With mud and weedy growth so foul I see
 Thy net, O Peter, that should any wave
 Assail it from without or trouble it,
 It might be rended, and so risk the ship.
 For now thy bark, no more, as erst, skims light
 With favoring breezes o'er the troubled sea ;
 But labours burthen'd so from stem to stern,
 That danger menaces the course it steers.
 Thy good successor, *by direct decree*
Of providence elect, with heart and hand
 Assiduous strives to bring it to the port.
 But spite his striving his intent is foiled
 By other's evil. So that all have seen
 That without aid from thee, he strives in vain."

The lofty pretensions of the Bishop of Rome, which our poetess, with all her reforming aspirations, goes out of her way to declare and maintain in the phrase of the above sonnet marked by Italics, were dear to the hearts of Italians. It may be, that an antagonistic bias, arising from feelings equally beyond the limits of the religious question, helped to add acrimony to the attacks of the transalpine reformers. But there can be no doubt, that Italian self-love was active in rendering distasteful to Italians a doctrine, whose effect would be to pull down Rome from her position as capital of the Christian world, and no longer permit an Italian ecclesiastic to issue his lofty decrees "Urbi et Orbi." And those best acquainted with the Italian mind of that period, as evidenced by its literature, and illustrated by its still-existing tendencies and preju-

dices, will most appreciate the extent to which such feelings unquestionably operated in preventing the reformation from taking root, and bearing fruit in Italy.

The readers of the foregoing sonnets, even those who are familiar with the language of the original, will probably have wondered at the greatness of the poetical reputation, which was built out of such materials. It is but fair, however, to the poetess to state, that the citations have been selected, rather with the view of decisively proving these Protestant leanings of Vittoria, which have been so eagerly denied, and of illustrating the tone of Italian Protestant feeling at that period, than of presenting the most favourable specimens of her poetry. However fitly devotional feeling may be clothed in poetry of the highest order, controversial divinity is not a happy subject for verse. And Vittoria, on the comparatively rare occasions, when she permits herself to escape from the consideration of disputed dogma, can make a nearer approach to true poetry of thought and expression.

In the following sonnet, it is curious to observe how the expression of the grand and simple sentiment of perfect trust in the will and intentions of the omnipotent Creator, which, in the first eight lines, rises into something like poetry, becomes flattened and debased into the most prosaic doggrel, as soon as the author, recollecting the controversies raging round her on the subject, bethinks her of the necessity of duly defining the theological virtue of "Faith," as being of that sort fit for the production of works.

"Deh ! mandi oggi, Signor, novello e chiaro
 Raggio al mio cor di quella ardente fede,
 Ch' opra sol per amor, non per mercede,
 Onde ugualmente il tuo voler gli è caro !

Dal dolce fonte tuo pensa che amaro
 Nascere non possa, anzi riceve e crede
 Per buon quant' ode, e per bel quanto vede,
 Per largo il ciel, quand' ei si mostra avaro.
 Se chieder grazia all' umil servo lice,
 Questa fede vorrei, che illustra, accende,
 E pasce l' alma sol di lume vero.
 Con questa in parte il gran valor s' intende,
 Che pianta e ferma in noi l' alta radice,
 Qual rende i frutti a lui tutti d'amore."

Which may be thus rendered:—

"Grant to my heart a pure fresh ray, O Lord,
 Of that bright ardent faith, which makes thy will
 Its best-loved law, and seeks it to fulfil
 For love alone, not looking for reward;—
 That faith, which deems no ill can come from thee,
 But humbly trusts, that, rightly understood
 All that meets eye or ear is fair and good,
 And Heaven's love oft in prayers refused can see.
 And if thy handmaid might prefer a suit,
 I would that faith possess that fires the heart,
 And feeds the soul with the true light alone;
 I mean hereby, that mighty power in part,
 Which plants and strengthens in us the deep root,
 From which all fruits of love for him are grown."

In the following sonnet, which is one of several dictated by the same mood of feeling, the more subjective tone of her thought affords us an autobiographical glimpse of her state of mind on religious subjects. We find, that the new tenets which she had imbibed had failed to give her peace of mind. That comfortable security, and undoubting satisfied tranquillity, procured for the mass of her orthodox contemporaries, by the due performance of their fasts, vigils, penitences, &c., was not attained for Vittoria by a creed, which required her, as she here tells us, to stifle the suggestions of her reason.

"Sc con l' armi celesti avess' io vinto
 Me stessa, i sensi, e la ragione umana,
 Andrei con altro spirto alta e lontana
 Dal mondo, e dai suo onor falso dipinto.
 Sull' ali della fede il pensier cinto
 Di speme, omai non più caduca e vana,
 Sarebbe fuor di questa valle insana
 Da verace virtute alzato e spinto.
 Ben ho già fermo l' occhio al miglior fine
 Dei nostro corso ; ma non volo ancora
 Per lo destro sentier salda e leggiera.
 Veggio i segni del sol, scorgo l' aurora ;
 Ma per li sacri giri alle divine
 Stanze non entro in quella luce vera.

Englished as follows :—

" Had I with heavenly arms 'gainst self and sense
 And human reason waged successful war,
 Then with a different spirit soaring far
 I'd fly the world's vain glory and pretence.
 Then soaring thought on wings of faith might rise
 Armed by a hope no longer vain or frail
 Far from the madness of this earthly vale,
 Led by true virtue towards its native skies.
 That better aim is ever in my sight,
 Of man's existence ; but not yet 'tis mine
 To speed sure-footed on the happy way.
 Signs of the rising sun and coming day
 I see ; but enter not the courts divine
 Whose holy portals lead to perfect light."

A touch of similar feeling may be observed also in the following sonnet, united with more of poetical feeling and expression. Indeed, this sonnet may be offered as a specimen of the author's happiest efforts.—

" Fra gelo e nebbia corro a Dio sovente
 Per foco e lume, onde i ghiacci disciolti
 Sieno, e gli ombrosí veli aperti e tolti
 Dalla divina luce e fiamma ardente.

E se fredda ed oscura è ancor la mente,
 Pur son tutti i pensieri al ciel rivolti;
 E par che dentro in gran silenzio ascolti
 Un suon, che sol nell' anima si sente;
 E dice; Non temer, chè venne al mondo
 Gesù d' eterno ben largo ampio mare,
 Per far leggiere ogni gravoso pondo.
 Sempre son l' onde sue più dolci e chiare
 A chi con umil barca in quel gran fondo
 Dell' alta sua bontà si lascia andare."

If the reader, who is able to form a judgment of the poetical merit of this sonnet only from the subjoined translation, should fail to find in it anything to justify the opinion that has been expressed of it, he is entreated to believe that the fault is that of the translator, who can promise only that the sense has been faithfully rendered:—

" Ofttimes to God through frost and cloud I go
 For light and warmth to break my icy chain,
 And pierce and rend my veils of doubt in twain
 With his divinest love, and radiant glow.
 And if my soul sit cold and dark below
 Yet all her longings fixed on heaven remain;
 And seems she 'mid deep silence to a strain
 To listen, which the soul alone can know,—
 Saying, Fear nought! for Jesus came on earth,—
 Jesus of endless joys the wide deep sea,
 To ease each heavy load of mortal birth.
 His waters ever clearest, sweetest be
 To him, who in a lonely bark drifts forth,
 On his great deeps of goodness trustfully."

It will probably be admitted, that the foregoing extracts from Vittoria Colonna's poetry, if they do not suffice to give the outline of the entire fabric of her religious faith, yet abundantly prove, that she must be classed among the Protestant and reforming party of her age and country, rather than among the orthodox Catholics, their opponents. The passages quoted all

bear, more or less directly, on a few special points of doctrine, as do also the great bulk of her religious poems. But these points are precisely those on which the reforming movement was based, the cardinal points of difference between the parties. They involve exactly those doctrines which Rome, on mature examination and reflection, rightly found to be fatally incompatible with her system. For the dominant party at Trent were assuredly wiser in their generation than such children of light, as the good Contarini, who dreamed that a purified Papacy was possible, and that Rome might still be Rome, after its creed had been thus modified. Caraffa and Ghislieri, Popes Paul IV. and Pius V., and their inquisitors knew very clearly better.

It is, of course, natural enough, that the points of doctrine then new and disputed, the points respecting which the poetess differed from the majority of the world around her, and which must have been the subject of her special meditation, should occupy also the most prominent position in her writings. Yet it is remarkable, that in so large a mass of poetry on exclusively religious themes, there should be found hardly a thought or sentiment on topics of practical morality. The title of "*Rime sacre e morali*," prefixed by Visconti to this portion of Vittoria's writings, is wholly a misnomer. If these sonnets furnish the materials for forming a tolerably accurate notion of her scheme of theology, our estimate of her views of morality must be sought elsewhere.

There is every reason to feel satisfied, both from such records as we have of her life, and from the perfectly agreeing testimony of her contemporaries, that the tenour of her own life and conduct was not only blameless, but marked by the consistent exercise

of many noble virtues. But, much as we hear from the lamentations of preachers of the habitual tendency of human conduct to fall short of human professions, the opposite phenomena exhibited by men, whose intuitive moral sense is superior to the teaching derivable from their creed, is perhaps quite as common. That band of eminent men, who were especially known as the maintainers and defenders of the peculiar tenets held by Vittoria, were unquestionably in all respects the best and noblest of their age and country. Yet their creed was assuredly an immoral one. And in the rare passages of our poetess's writings, in which a glimpse of moral theory can be discerned, the low and unenlightened nature of it is such, as to prove, that the heaven-taught heart reached purer heights than the creed-taught intelligence could attain.

What could be worse, for instance, than the morality of the following conclusion of a sonnet, in which she has been lamenting the blindness of those who sacrifice eternal bliss for the sake of worldly pleasures.

She writes :—

“ Poichè 'l mal per natura non gli annoia,
E del ben per ragion piacer non hanno,
Abbian almen di Dio giusto timore.”

In English :—

“ Since evil by its nature pains them not,
Nor good for its own proper sake delights,
Let them at least have righteous fear of God.”

She appears incapable of understanding, that no fear of God could in any wise avail to improve or profit him, who has no aversion from evil, and no love for good. She does not perceive, that to inculcate so godless a fear of God, is to make the Creator a mere bug-

bear for police purposes ; and that a theory of Deity constructed on this basis would become a degrading demonolatry !

Vittoria Colonna has survived in men's memory as a poetess. But she is far more interesting to the historical student, who would obtain a full understanding of that wonderful sixteenth century, as a Protestant. Her highly gifted and richly cultivated intelligence, her great social position, and above all, her close intimacy with the eminent men who strove to set on foot an Italian reformation which should not be incompatible with the Papacy, make the illustration of her religious opinions a matter of no slight historical interest. And the bulk of the citations from her works has accordingly been selected with this view. But it is fair to her reputation to give one sonnet at least, chosen for no other reason than its merit.

The following, written apparently on the anniversary of our Saviour's crucifixion, is certainly one of the best, if not the best in the collection :

“ Gli angeli eletti al gran bene infinito
 Braman oggi soffrir penosa morte,
 Acciò nella celeste empirea corte
 Non sia più il servo, che il signor, gradito.
 Piange l' antica madre il gusto ardito
 Ch' a' figli suoi del ciel chiuse le porte;
 E che due man piagate or sicno scorte
 Da ridurne al cammin per lei smarrito.
 Asconde il sol la sua fulgente chioma ;
 Spezzansi i sassi vivi; apronsi i monti ;
 Trema la terra e 'l ciel; turbansi l' acque;
 Piangon gli spirti, al nostro mal si pronti,
 Delle catene lor l' aggiunta soma.
 L' uomo non piange, e pur piangendo nacque !”

Of which the following is an inadequate but tolerably faithful translation :

"The angels to eternal bliss preferred,
 Long on this day a painful death to die,
 Lest in the heavenly mansions of the sky
 The servant be more favoured than his Lord.
 Man's ancient mother weeps the deed, this day
 That shut the gates of heaven against her race,
 Weeps the two piercèd hands, whose work of grace,
 Refinds the path, from which she made man stray.
 The sun his ever-burning ray doth veil ;
 Earth and sky tremble ; ocean quakes amain,
 And mountains gape, and living rocks are torn.
 The fiends, on watch for human evil, wail
 The added weight of their restraining chain.
 Man only weeps not ; yet was weeping born."

As the previous extracts from the works of Vittoria have been, as has been stated, selected principally with a view to prove her Protestantism, it is fair to observe, that there are several sonnets addressed to the Virgin Mary, and some to various Saints, from which (though they are wholly free from any allusion to the grosser superstitions that Rome encourages her faithful disciples to connect with these personages), it is yet clear that the writer believed in the value of saintly intercession at the throne of grace. It is also worth remarking, that she nowhere betrays the smallest consciousness that she is differing in opinion from the recognised tenets of the Church, unless it be found, as was before suggested, in an occasional obscurity of phrase, which seems open to the suspicion of having been intentional. The great majority of these poems, however, were in all probability composed before the Church had entered on her new career of persecution. And as regards the ever-recurring leading point of "justification by grace," it was impossible to say exactly how far it was orthodox to go in the statement of this tenet, until Rome had finally decided her doctrine by the decrees of the Council of Trent.

One other remark, which will hardly fail to suggest itself to the modern reader of Vittoria's poetry, may be added respecting these once celebrated and enthusiastically received works. There is not to be discovered throughout the whole of them one spark of Italian, or patriotic feeling. The absence of any such, must, undoubtedly, be regarded only as a confirmation of the fact asserted in a previous chapter, that no sentiment of the kind was then known in Italy. In that earlier portion of her works, which is occupied almost exclusively with her husband's praises, it is hardly possible that the expression of such feelings should have found no place, had they existed in her mind. But it is a curious instance of the degree to which even the better intellects of an age are blinded by, and made subservient to, the tone of feeling and habits of thought prevalent around them, that it never occurs to this pure and lofty-minded Vittoria, in celebrating the prowess of her hero, to give a thought to the cause for which he was drawing the sword. To prevail, to be the stronger, "to take great cities," "to rout the foe," appears to be all that her beau ideal of heroism required.

Wrong is done, and the strong-handed doer of it admired, the moral sense is blunted by the cowardly worship of success, and might takes from right the suffrages of the feeble, in the nineteenth as in the sixteenth century. But the contemplation of the total absence from such a mind as that of Vittoria Colonna, of all recognition of a right and a wrong in such matters, furnishes highly instructive evidence of the reality of the moral progress mankind has achieved.

CHAPTER VIII.

Return to Rome.—Her great reputation.—Friendship with Michael Angelo.—Medal of this period.—Removal to Orvieto.—Visit from Luca Contile.—Her determination not to quit the Church.—Francesco d' Olanda.—His record of conversations with Vittoria.—Vittoria at Viterbo.—Influence of Cardinal Pole on her mind.—Last return to Rome.—Her death.

VITTORIA arrived in Rome from Ferrara in all probability about the end of the year 1537. She was now in the zenith of her reputation. The learned and elegant Bembo* writes of her, that he considered her poetical judgment as sound and authoritative as that of the greatest masters of the art of song. Guidiccioni, the poetical Bishop of Fossombrone, and one of Paul III.'s ablest diplomatists, declares† that the ancient glory of Tuscany had altogether passed into Latium in her person; and sends her sonnets of his own, with earnest entreaties that she will point out the faults of them. Veronica Gambara, herself a poetess, of merit perhaps not inferior to that of Vittoria, professed herself her most ardent admirer, and engaged Rinaldo Corso to write the commentary on her poems, which he executed as we have seen. Bernardo Tasso made her the subject of several of his poems. Giovio dedicated to her his life of Pescara, and Cardinal Pompeo Colonna his book on "The Praises of Women;" and

* Bembo. Opere, vol. iii. p. 65.

† Opere, ed. Ven., p. 164.

Contarini paid her the far more remarkable compliment of dedicating to her his work "On Free Will."

Paul III. was, as Muratori says,* by no means well disposed towards the Colonna family. Yet Vittoria must have had influence with the haughty and severe old Farnese. For both Bembo, and Fregoso, the Bishop of Naples, have taken occasion to acknowledge that they owed their promotion to the purple in great measure to her.

But the most noteworthy event of this period of Vittoria's life, was the commencement of her acquaintance with Michael Angelo Buonarroti.† That great man was then in his 63rd year, while the poetess was in her 47th. The acquaintanceship grew rapidly into a close and durable friendship, which lasted during the remainder of Vittoria's life. It was a friendship eminently honourable to both of them. Michael Angelo was a man whose influence on his age was felt and acknowledged, while he was yet living and exercising it, to a degree rarely observable even in the case of the greatest minds. He had, at the time in question, already reached the zenith of his fame, although he lived to witness and enjoy it for another quarter of a century. He was a man formed by nature, and already habituated by the social position his contemporaries had accorded to him, to mould men—not to be moulded by them—not a smooth or pliable man; rugged rather, self-relying, self-concentrated, and, though full of kindness for those who needed kindness, almost a stern man; no courtier, though accustomed to the society of courts; and apt to consider courtier-like courtesies and habitudes as

* Annales, ad. ann. 1540.

† Visconti, p. 123.

impertinent impediments to the requirements of his high calling, to be repressed rather than condescended to. Yet the strong and kingly nature of this high-souled old man was moulded into new form by contact with that of the comparatively youthful poetess.

The religious portion of the great artist's nature had scarcely shaped out for itself any more defined and substantial form of expression than a worship of the beautiful in spirit as well as in matter. By Vittoria he was made a devout Christian. The change is strongly marked in his poetry; and in several passages of the poems, four or five in number, addressed to her, he attributes it entirely to her influence.*

Some silly stuff has been written by very silly writers, by way of imparting the "interesting" character of a *belle passion*, more or less platonic, to this friendship between the sexagenarian artist and the immaculate Colonna. No argument is necessary to indicate the utter absurdity of an idea which implies a thorough ignorance of the persons in question, of the circumstances of their friendship, and of all that remains on record of what passed between them. Mr. Harford, whose "Life of Michael Angelo" has been already quoted, was permitted, he says, to hear read the letters from Vittoria to her friend, which are preserved in that collection of papers and memorials of the great artist, which forms the most treasured possession of his descendants; † and he gives the following account of them: ‡

"They are five in number; and there is a sixth, addressed by her to a friend, which relates to Michael Angelo. Two of these letters refer in very grateful

* See Harford's Michael Angelo, vol. ii. p. 148, *et seq.*

† Note 4.

‡ Harford's Michael Angelo, vol. ii. p. 158.

terms to the fine drawings he had been making for her, and to which she alludes with admiration. Another glances with deep interest at the devout sentiments of a sonnet, which it appears he had sent for her perusal. . . . Another tells him in playful terms that his duties as architect of St. Peter's, and her own to the youthful inmates of the convent of St. Catherine at Viterbo, admit not of their frequently exchanging letters. This must have been written just a year before her death, which occurred in 1547. Michael Angelo became architect of St. Peter's in 1546. These letters are written with the most perfect ease, in a firm, strong hand; but there is not a syllable in any of them approaching to tenderness."

The period of Vittoria's stay in Rome on this occasion must have been a pleasant one. The acknowledged leader of the best and most intellectual society in that city; surrounded by a company of gifted and high-minded men, bound to her and to each other by that most intimate and ennobling of all ties, the common profession of a higher, nobler, purer theory of life than that which prevailed around them, and a common membership of what might almost be called a select church within a church, whose principles and teaching its disciples hoped to see rapidly spreading and beneficially triumphant; dividing her time between her religious duties, her literary occupations, and conversation with well-loved and well-understood friends;—Vittoria can hardly have been still tormented by temptations to commit suicide. Yet in a medal struck in her honour at this period of her life, the last of the series engraved for Visconti's edition of her works, the reverse represents a phoenix on her funeral pile gazing on the sun, while the flames are rising around her.

The obverse has a bust of the poetess, showing the features a good deal changed in the course of the six or seven years which had elapsed since the execution of that silly Pyramus and Thisbe medal mentioned in a previous chapter, though still regular and well formed. The tendency to fatness and to a comfortable-looking double chin is considerably increased. She wears a singularly unbecoming head-dress of plaited linen, sitting close to and covering the entire head, with long pendants at the sides falling over the shoulders.

These pleasant Roman days were, however, destined to be of brief duration. They were cut short, strange as the statement may seem, by the imposition of an increased tax upon salt. For when Paul III. resorted, in 1539, to that always odious and cruel means of pillaging his people, Ascanio Colonna maintained that, by virtue of some ancient privilege, the new tax could not be levied on his estates. The pontifical tax-gatherers imprisoned certain of his vassals for refusing to pay; whereupon Ascanio assembled his retainers, made a raid into the Campagna, and drove off a large number of cattle.* The Pope lost no time in gathering an army of ten thousand men, and "war was declared" between the sovereign and the Colonna. The varying fortunes of this "war" have been narrated in detail by more than one historian.† Much mischief was done, and a great deal of misery occasioned by both the contending parties. But at length the forces of the Sovereign got the better of those of his vassal, and the principal fortresses of the Colonna were taken, and their fortifications ordered to be razed.

* Coppi. Mem. Col., p. 306.

† Especially Adriani, Storia di suoi tempi.

It was in consequence of these misfortunes, and of that remarkable "solidarity" which, as has been before observed, united in those days the members of a family in their fortunes and reverses, that Vittoria quitted Rome, probably towards the end of 1540, and retired to Orvieto. But the loss of their brightest ornament was a misfortune which the higher circles of Roman society could not submit to patiently. Many of the most influential personages at Paul III.'s court visited the celebrated exile at Orvieto, and succeeded ere long in obtaining her return to Rome after a very short absence.* And we accordingly find her again in the eternal city in the August of 1541.

There is a letter written by Luca Contile,† the Sienese historian, dramatist and poet, in which he speaks of a visit he had paid to Vittoria in Rome in that month. She asked him, he writes, for news of Fra Bernardino (Ochino), and on his replying that he had left behind him at Milan the highest reputation for virtue and holiness, she answered, "God grant that he so persevere!"

On this passage of Luca Contile's letter, Visconti and others have built a long argument in proof of Vittoria's orthodoxy. It is quite clear, they say, that she already suspected and lamented Ochino's progress towards heresy, and thus indicates her own aversion to aught that might lead to separation from the church of Rome. It would be difficult, however, to show that the simple phrase in question had necessarily any such meaning. But any dispute on this point is altogether nugatory; for it may be at once admitted that Vittoria did not quit, and in all probability would not under

* Visconti, p. cxxvii.

† Contile, *Lettere*, p. 19; Venice, 1564.

any circumstances have quitted, the communion of the Church. And if this is all that her Romanist biographers wish to maintain, they unquestionably are correct in their statements. She acted in this respect in conformity with the conduct of the majority of those eminent men whose disciple and friend she was during so many years. And the final extinction of the reformatory movement in Italy was in great measure due precisely to the fact that conformity to Rome was dearer to most Italian minds than the independent assertion of their own opinions. It may be freely granted that there is every reason to suppose that it would have been so to Vittoria, had she not been so fortunate as to die before her peculiar tenets were so definitively condemned as to make it necessary for her to choose between abandoning them or abandoning Rome. But surely all the interest which belongs to the question of her religious opinions consists in the fact that she, like the majority of the best minds of her country and age, assuredly held doctrines which Rome discovered and declared to be incompatible with her creed.

A more agreeable record of Vittoria's presence in Rome at this time, and an interesting glimpse of the manner in which many of her hours were passed, is to be found in the papers left by one Francesco d' Olanda,* a Portuguese painter, who was then in the eternal city. He had been introduced, he tells us, by the kindness of Messer Lattanzio Tolemei of Siena to the Marchesa de Pescara, and also to Michael Angelo; and he has recorded at length several conversations between these and two or three other members of their society in

* Note 5.

which he took part. The object of his notes appears to have been chiefly to preserve the opinions expressed by the great Florentine on subjects connected with the arts. And it must be admitted, that the conversation of the eminent personages mentioned, as recorded by the Portuguese painter, appears, if judged by the standard of nineteenth century notions, to have been wonderfully dull and flat.

The record is a very curious one even in this point of view. It is interesting to measure the distance between what was considered first-rate conversation in 1540, and what would be tolerated among intelligent people in 1850. The good-old-times admirers, who would have us believe that the ponderous erudition of past generations is distasteful to us, only by reason of the touch-and-go butterfly frivolousness of the modern mind, are in error. The long discourses which charmed a sixteenth century audience, are to us intolerably boring, because they are filled with platitudes;—with facts, inferences, and speculations, that is, which have passed and repassed through the popular mind, till they have assumed the appearance of self-evident truths and fundamental axioms, which it is loss of time to spend words on. And time has so wonderfully risen in value! And though there are more than ever men whose discourse might be instructive and profitable to their associates, the universality of the habit of reading prevents conversation from being turned into a lecture. Those who have matter worth communicating, can do so more effectually and to a larger audience by means of the pen; and those willing to be instructed, can make themselves masters of the thoughts of others far more satisfactorily by the medium of a book.

But the external circumstances of these conversa-

tions, noted down for us by Francesco d'Olanda, give us an amusing peep into the literary life of the Roman world three hundred years ago.

It was one Sunday afternoon that the Portuguese artist went to call on Messer Lattanzio Tolemei, nephew of the cardinal of that name. The servants told him, that their master was in the church of San Silvestro, at Monte Cavallo, in company with the Marchesa di Pescara, for the purpose of hearing a lecture on the Epistles of St. Paul, from a certain Friar Ambrose of Siena. Maestro Francesco lost no time in following his friend thither. And "as soon as the reading and the interpretations of it were over," the Marchesa turning to the stranger, and inviting him to sit beside her, said; "If I am not mistaken, Francesco d'Olanda would better like to hear Michael Angelo preach on painting, than to listen to Friar Ambrose's lecture."

Whereupon the painter, "feeling himself piqued," assures the lady that he can take interest in other matters than painting, and that however willingly he would listen to Michael Angelo on art, he would prefer to hear Friar Ambrose when St. Paul's epistles were in question.

"Do not be angry, Messer Francesco," said Signor Lattanzio, thereupon. "The Marchesa is far from doubting that the man capable of painting may be capable of aught else. We, in Italy, have too high an estimate of art for that. But, perhaps, we should gather from the remark of the Signora Marchesa the intention of adding to the pleasure you have already had, that of hearing Michael Angelo."

"In that case, said I, her Excellence would do only as is her wont;—that is, to accord greater favours than one would have dared to ask of her."

So Vittoria calls to a servant, and bids him go to the house of Michael Angelo, and tell him, "that I and Messer Lattanzio are here in this cool chapel, that the church is shut, and very pleasant, and ask him if he will come and spend a part of the day with us, that we may put it to profit in his company. But do not tell him that Francesco d'Olanda the Spaniard is here."

Then there is some very mild raillery about how Michael Angelo was to be led to speak of painting;—it being, it seems, very questionable whether he could be induced to do so; and a little bickering follows between Maestro Francesco and Friar Ambrose, who feels convinced that Michael will not be got to talk before the Portuguese, while the latter boasts of his intimacy with the great man.

Presently there is a knock at the church door. It is Michael Angelo, who has been met by the servant as he was going towards the baths, talking with Orbino, his colour-grinder.

"The Marchesa rose to receive him, and remained standing a good while, before making him sit down between her and Messer Lattanzio." Then, "with an art, which I can neither describe nor imitate, she began to talk of various matters with infinite wit and grace, without ever touching the subject of painting, the better to make sure of the great painter."

"One is sure enough," she says at last, "to be completely beaten, as often as one ventures to attack Michael Angelo on his own ground, which is that of wit and raillery. You will see, Messer Lattanzio, that to put him down and reduce him to silence, we must talk to him of briefs, law processes, or painting."

By which subtle and deep-laid plot the great man is set off into a long discourse on painters and painting.

“ His Holiness,” said the Marchesa, after a while, “ has granted me the favour of authorising me to build a new convent, near this spot, on the slope of Monte Cavallo, where there is the ruined portico, from the top of which, it is said, that Nero looked on while Rome was burning ; so that virtuous women may efface the trace of so wicked a man. I do not know, Michael Angelo, what form or proportions to give the building, or on which side to make the entrance. Would it not be possible to join together some parts of the ancient constructions, and make them available towards the new building ? ”

“ Yes,” said Michael Angelo ; “ the ruined portico might serve for a bell-tower.”

This repartee, says our Portuguese reporter, was uttered with so much seriousness and *aplomb*, that Messer Lattanzio could not forbear from remarking it.

From which we are led to infer, that the great Michael was understood to have made a joke. He added, however, more seriously ; “ I think, that your Excellence may build the proposed convent without difficulty ; and when we go out, we can, if your Excellence so please, have a look at the spot, and suggest to you some ideas.”

Then, after a complimentary speech from Vittoria, in which she declares that the public, who know Michael Angelo’s works only without being acquainted with his character, are ignorant of the best part of him, the lecture, to which all this is introductory begins. And when the company part at its close, an appointment is made to meet again another Sunday in the same church.

A painter in search of an unhackneyed subject might

easily choose a worse one than that suggested by this notable group, making the cool and quiet church their Sunday afternoon drawing-room.

The few remaining years of Vittoria's life were spent between Rome and Viterbo, an episcopal city some thirty miles to the north of it. In this latter her home was in the convent of the nuns of St. Catherine. Her society there consisted chiefly of Cardinal Pole, the governor of Viterbo, her old friend Marco Antonio Flaminio, and Archbishop Soranzo.

During these years the rapidly increasing consciousness on the part of the Church of the danger of the doctrines held by the reforming party, was speedily making it unsafe to profess those opinions, which, as we have seen, gave the colour to so large a portion of Vittoria's poetry, and which had formed her spiritual character. And these friends, in the closest intimacy with whom she lived at Viterbo, were not the sort of men calculated to support her in any daring reliance on the dictates of her own soul, when these chanced to be in opposition to the views of the Church. Pole appears to have been at this time the special director of her conscience. And we know but too well, from the lamentable sequel of his own career, the sort of counsel he would be likely to give her under the circumstances. There is an extremely interesting letter extant, written by her from Viterbo to the Cardinal Cervino, who was afterwards Pope Marcellus II., which proves clearly enough, to the great delight of her orthodox admirers, that let her opinions have been what they might, she was ready to "submit" them to the censureship of Rome. We have seen how closely her opinions agreed with those which drove Bernardino Ochino to separate himself from the

Church, and fly from its vengeance. Yet under Pole's tutelage she writes as follows :—

“ Most Illustrious and most Reverend Sir,

“ The more opportunity I have had of observing the actions of his Eminence the Cardinal of England (Pole), the more clear has it seemed to me that he is a true and sincere servant of God. Whenever, therefore, he charitably condescends to give me his opinion on any point, I conceive myself safe from error in following his advice. And he told me that, in his opinion, I ought, in case any letter or other matter should reach me from Fra Bernardino, to send the same to your most Reverend Lordship, and return no answer, unless I should be directed to do so. I send you therefore the enclosed, which I have this day received, together with the little book attached. The whole was in a packet, which came to the post here by a courier from Bologna, without any other writing inside. And I have thought it best not to make use of any other means of sending it, than by a servant of my own.” * * *

She adds in a postscript :

“ It grieves me much that the more he tries to excuse himself the more he accuses himself; and the more he thinks to save others from shipwreck, the more he exposes himself to the flood, being himself out of the ark which saves and secures.” *

Poor Ochino little thought probably that his letter to his former admiring and fervent disciple, would be passed on with such a remark to the hands of his enemies! He ought, however, to have been aware that princesses and cardinals, whatever speculations

they may have indulged in, do not easily become heretics.

She returned once more from Viterbo to Rome towards the end of the year 1544, and took up her residence in the convent of Benedictines of St Anne. While there she composed the latin prayer, printed in the note,* which has been much admired, and which, though not so Ciceronian in its diction as Bembo might have written, will bear comparison with similar compositions by many more celebrated persons. Several of the latest of her poems were also written at this time. But her health began to fail so rapidly as to give great uneasiness to her friends. Several letters are extant from Tolomei to her physician, anxiously inquiring after her health, urging him to neglect no resources of his art, and bidding him remember that “the lives of many, who continually receive from her their food—some that of the body, and others that of the mind—are bound up in hers.”† The celebrated physician and poet Fracastoro, was written to in Verona. In his reply, after suggesting medical remedies, he says, “Would that a physician for her mind could be found! Otherwise the fairest light in this world will, from causes by no means clear (*a non so che strano modo*) be extinguished and taken from our eyes.”‡

The medical opinion of Fracastoro, writing from a distance, may not be of much value. But it is certain that many circumstances combined to render these declining years of Vittoria's life unhappy. The fortunes of her family were under a cloud; and it is probable that she was as much grieved by her brother's

* Note 6.

† Lettere del Tolomei. Venezia, 1573.

‡ Visconti, p. cxxxiv.

conduct, as by the consequences of it. The death also of the Marchese del Vasto, in the flower of his age, about this time, was a severe blow to her. Ever since those happy early days in Ischia, when she had been to him, as she said, morally and intellectually a mother, the closest ties of affection had united them; and his loss was to Vittoria like that of a son. Then again, though she had perfectly made up her mind as to the line of conduct it behoved her to take in regard to any difficulties of religious opinion, yet it cannot be doubted that the necessity of separating herself from so many whom she had loved and venerated, deserting them, as it were, in their falling fortunes, must have been acutely painful to her. Possibly also conscience was not wholly at rest with her on this matter. It may be that the still voice of inward conviction would sometimes make obstinate murmur against blindfold submission to a priesthood, who ought not, according to the once expressed opinion of the poetess, to come between the creature and his creator.

As she became gradually worse and weaker, she was removed from the convent of St. Anne, to the neighbouring house of Giuliano Cesarini, the husband of Giulia Colonna, the only one of her kindred then left in Rome. And there she breathed her last towards the end of February, 1547, in the 57th year of her age.

In her last hours she was visited by her faithful and devotedly attached friend Michael Angelo, who watched the departure of the spirit from her frame; and who declared,* years afterwards, that he had never ceased to regret that in that solemn moment he had not ventured to press his lips for the first and last time, to the marble forehead of the dead.

* *Condivi. Vita.*

She had directed that her funeral should be in all respects like that of one of the sisters of the convent in which she last resided. And so completely were her behests attended to, that no memorial of any kind remains to tell the place of her sepulture.

APPENDIX.

ORIGINAL TEXT OF CATHERINE'S LETTER TO THE KING OF FRANCE.

LETTERA 187.

Carissimo padre in Cristo dolce Gesù. Io Catarina, schiava de' servi di Gesù Cristo, scrivo a voi nel prezioso sangue suo, con desiderio di vedere in voi uno vero e perfettissimo lume, acciò che cognosciate le verità di quello che v'è necessario per la vostra salute. Senza questo lume andremmo in tenebre, la qual tenebre non lascia discernere quello che ci è nocivo all' anima e al corpo, e quello che ci è utile; e per questo guasta il gusto dell' anima, che le cose buone le fanno parer cattive e le cattive buone, cioè il vizio; e quelle cose che ci conducono a peccato, ci pajono buone e dilettevoli; e le virtù e quello che ci induce alla virtù ci pajono amare e di grande malagevolezza: ma chi ha lume cognosce bene la verità: e però ama la virtù, e Dio, che è la cagione di ogni virtù, ed odia il vizio e la propria sensualità, che è cagione d' ogni vizio. Chi ci tolle questo vero e dolce lume? L'amor proprio che l' uomo ha a sè medesimo, il quale è una nuvola che offusca l' occhio dell' intelletto e ricopre la pupilla del lume della santissima fede; e però va come cieco ed ignorante seguitando la fragilità sua, tutto passionato senza lume di ragione, si come animale che, perchè non ha ragione, si lascia guidare al proprio sentimento. Grande miseria è dell' uomo, il quale Dio ha creato all' imagine e similitudine sua, che egli volontariamente per suo difetto si facci peggio che animale bruto, come ingrato ed ignorante non cognosce, nè ricognosce li benefizj da Dio, ma ritribuis-

celi a sè medesimo. Dall' amor proprio procede ogni male. Unde vengono le ingiustizie e tutti gli altri difetti? dall' amore proprio. Egli commette ingiustizia contra Dio, contra sè e contra al prossimo suo, e contra la santa Chiesa. Contra Dio la commette, che non rende gloria e loda al nome suo come egli è obbligato; a sè non rende odio e dispiacimento del vizio, ed amore delle virtù; ne al prossimo la benivolenza; e se egli è signore non gli tiene giustizia, perchè non la fa se non secondo il piacere delle creature o per proprio suo piacere umano. Nè alla Chiesa rende l' obbedienza e non la sovviene, ma continuamente la perseguita: di tutto è cagione l' amor proprio, che non il lascia cognoscere la Verità, perchè è privato del lume. Questo ci è molto manifesto, e tutto di il vediamo e proviamo in noi medesimi, che egli è così.

Non vorrei, carrissimo padre, che questa nuvola vi tollesse il lume; ma voglio che in voi sia quel lume che vi faccia cognoscere e discernere la Verità. Parmi secondo che io intendo, che cominciate a lassarvi guidare al consiglio de' tenebrosi, e voi sapete, che se l' uno cieco guida l' altro, ambidue caggiono nella fossa. Così diverrà a voi, se voi non ci ponete altro remedio che quello che io sento. Honne grande ammirazione che uomo cattolico che voglia temere Dio ed esser virile, si lassi guidare come fanciullo, e che non vegga come metta sè e altrui in tanta ruina, quanta è di contaminare il lume della santissima fede per consiglio e detto di coloro che noi vediamo esser membri del demonio, arbori corrotti, dei quali ci sono manifesti i difetti loro per l'ultimo veleno che hanno seminato della eresia: dicendo che papa Urbano VI. non sia veramente papa. Aprite l' occhio dell' intelletto, e riguardate che essi mentono sopra il capo loro, per loro medesimi si possono confondere, e veggonsi degni di grande supplicio da qualunque lato noi ci volliamo. Se noi ci volliamo a quelli che essi dicono, che l' elessero per paura della furia del populo, essi non dicono la verità, perocchè prima l' avevano eletto con elezione canonica ed ordinata sì come fosse eletto mai verun altro sommo pontifice. Essi si spacciarono ben di fare la elezione per lo timore che il populo no si levasse, ma non che per timore elli non eleggessero misser Bartolomeo arcivescovo di Bari, il quale è oggi papa Urbano VI., e così confesso in verità, e non lo niego. Quello che essi elessero per paura, ciò fu missere di Santo Pietro, apparbe evidente a ciascuno, ma la elezione di papa Urbano era fatta ordi-

namente come detto è. Questo annunziarono a voi e a noi, ed agli altri signori del mondo, manifestando per opera quello che ci dicevano con parole, cioè facendoli riverenzia, adorandolo come Cristo in terra, e coronandolo con tanta solennità; rifacendo di nuovo l'elezione con grande concordia: a lui come sommo pontefice chiesero le grazie, ed usaronle; e se non fusse stato vero, che papa Urbano fusse papa, ma che lo avessero eletto per paura, e non sarebbero essi degni eternalmente di confusione? Che le colonne della santa Chiesa poste per dilatare la fede, per timore della morte corporale volessero dare a loro ed a noi morte eternale? Mostrando ci per padre quello che non fussi? E non sarebbero essi ladri, tollendo ed usando quello, che non potessero usare? Sì ben; se vero fusse quello che ora dicono che non è, anco è veramente papa Urbano VI., ma come stolti e matti accecati dal proprio amore, hanno mostrata e data a noi questa verità, e per loro tengono la bugia: tanto la confessarono questa verità, quanto la Santità sua indugiò a voler correggere i vizi loro: ma come egli cominciò a monderli ed a mostrare, che lo scellerato viver loro li era spiacevole e che egli voleva ponervi il rimedio, subito levarono il capo. E contra chi l'hanno levato? contra la santa fede. Fatto hanno peggio che cristiani rinnegati.

O miseri uomini! Essi non cognoscono la loro ruina, nè chi gli sequita, che se la cognoscessero, essi chiederebbero l'adiutorio divino; ricognoscerebbero le colpe loro, e non sarebbero ostinati come dimonia, che drittamente pajono dimonj, e preso hanno l'ufficio loro. L'ufficio delle dimonia è di pervertire l'anime da Cristo crocifisso, sottrarle dalla via della verità, e inducierle alla bugia e recarle a sè, che è padre delle bugie per pena e per supplicio, dando a loro, quello che egli ha per sè. Così questi vanno sovvertendo la verità, la quel verità essi medesimi ci hanno data, e riducendo alla bugia, hanno messo tutto il mondo in divisione; e di quel male che essi hanno in loro, di quello porgono a noi. Voliamo noi ben conoscere questa verità? Or ragguardiamo e consideriamo la vita e costumi loro, e che sèquito essi hanno pure di loro medesimi, che seguitano le vestigie delle iniquità, perocchè l'uno dimonio non è contrario all'altro, anco s'accordano insieme. E perdonatemi, carissimo padre: padre vi terrò in quanto io vi vegga amatore della verità e confonditore della bugia: perchè io dico così, perocchè 'l dolore della dannazione loro e d'altrui me n'è cagione, e l'amore ch'io porto alla salute loro. Questo non

dico in dispregio loro in quanto creature, ma in dispregio del vizio e dell'eresia che essi hanno seminata per tutto il mondo, e della crudeltà che essi usano a loro e all'anime tapinelle che per loro periscono; delle quali li converrà render ragione dinanzi al sommo giudice: che se fossero stati uomini che avessero temuto Dio o la vergogna del mondo, se Dio non volevano temere: se papa Urbano gli avessi fatto il peggio, che egli l'avesse potuto fare, e maggiore vituperio avrebbe pazientemente portato ed eletto innanzi mille morti, che fare quello che hanno fatto, che a maggior vergogna e danno non possono venire, che apparire agli occhi delle creature scismatici ed eretici contaminatori della santa fede. Se io veggessi il danno dell'anima e del corpo, si mostrano per l'eresia privati di Dio per grazia, e corporalmente privati della dignità loro di ragione, ed essi medesimi l'hanno fatto. Se io ragguardo il divino giudizio, essi si vede presso a loro, se non si levano di questa tenebre, perocchè ogni colpa è punita e ogni bene è remunerato. Duro li sarà a ricaleitrare a Dio, se tutto lo sforzo umano avessero. Dio è somma fortezza che fortifica i debili che ci confidano e sperano in lui. Ed è verità. E la verità è quella cosa che ci delibera. Noi vediamo, che solo la verità de' servi di Dio seguitano e tengono questa verità di papa Urbano VI., confessandolo veramente papa, come egli è; non troverete un servo di Dio che tenga il contrario, che sia servo di Dio; non dico di quelli che portano di fuore il vestimento della pecora, e dentro sono lupi rapaci. E credete voi, che se questa non fusse verità che Dio sostenesse, che i servi suoi andassero in tanta tenebre? Non il sosterebbe. Se egli il sostiene all'iniqui uomini del mondo, non sostiene a loro, e però l'ha dato lume di questa verità, perchè non è spregiatore de' santi desiderj, anco ne è accettatore come padre benigno e pietoso che gli è. Questi vorrei che voi chiamaste a voi, a farvi dichiarare di questa verità, e non voliate andare sì ignorantemente. Non vi muova la passione propria che ella sarà peggio a voi che a persona. Abbiate compassione a tante anime, quante mettete nelle mani delle dimonia. Se non volete fare il bene, almeno non fate male, ch'el male spessi volte torna più sopra colui che'l fa, che sopra colui a chi vuole essere fatto; tanto male n' esce, che ne perdiamo Dio per grazia, consumansi e beni temporali, e seguitane la morte degli uomini. Doimè! e non par che noi vediamo lume, che la nuvola dell'amor proprio ci ha tolto il lume, e non ci lascia vedere; per questo siamo atti a ricevere ogni male informazione che ci

fusse data contra la verità dagli amatori di loro medesimi: ma se averemo il lume non sarà così ma con grande prudenzia e timore santo di Dio, vorrete cognoscere ed investigare questa verità per uomini di coscienza e di scienza. Se voi vorrete, in voi non cadrà ignoranza, perchè avete costà la fontana della scienza, la quale temo che non perdiate, se voi terrete questi modi, e sapete bene come ne starà il reame vostro, se saranno uomini di buona coscienza, che non vogliono seguitare il piacere umano con timore servile, ma la verità; essi vi dichiareranno e porranno in pace la mente e l'anima vostra. Or non più così, carissimo padre, recatevi la mente al petto, pensate che voi dovete morire e non sapete quando; ponetevi dinanzi all'occhio dell'intelletto Dio e la verità sua, e non la passione nè l'amore della patria, che quanto a Dio non doviamo fare differenza più d'uno che d'un altro, perchè tutti siamo esciti dalla sua santa mente, creati all'immagine e similitudine sua, e ricomprati nel preziosa sangue dell'unigenito suo Figliuolo. So' certa, che se averete il lume voi il farete, e non aspetterete il tempo, perchè il tempo non aspetta voi, ed invitate loro a tornare alla santa e vera obbedienza, ma altrimenti no. E però dissi che io desideraro di vedere in voi un vero e perfettissimo lume, acciocchè col lume cognosciate, amiare e temiate la verità. Sarà allora beata l'anima mia per la salute vostra, di vedervi escire di tanto errore. Altro non vi dico. Permanete nella santa e dolce dilezioni di Dio. Perdonatemi, se troppo v'ho gravato di parole. L'amore della vostra salute mi costringe a più tosto dirvele a bocca con la presenza che per scritta. Dio vi riempia della sua dolcezza grazia. Gesù dolce, Gesù amore.

NOTES.

NOTE TO LIFE OF CATHERINE OF SIENA.

Note 1.—Page 5.

ALTHOUGH I have, since writing the passage in the text, been convinced by the letter of Dr. H. C. Barlow in the *Athenæum* of July the 3rd, 1858, that the Fontebranda at Siena was not alluded to by Dante in the well-known passage referred to, yet as the error, in which I shared, is so general, that every "Dantescan pilgrim" *does*, as stated in the text, hurry to visit the Sienese fountain, solely for the sake of that one line of the great poet, I have not thought it necessary to alter the passage; contenting myself with providing against further propagation of the mistake by this note. I have again visited Romena in the Casentino, since reading Dr. Barlow's convincing letter; and have no doubt whatever, that Adam the coiner, was thinking of the well-remembered waters of the Casentino, the scene of his crime,—a locality with which the poet also was, as we know, familiar,—and not of the distant and *nihil-ad-rem* Siena fountain; which will henceforth be deposed from its Dantescan honours by the verdict of all save Sienese students of the Inferno. These Dr. Barlow must not expect to convince.

NOTES TO LIFE OF CATERINA SFORZA.

1.—Page 100.

MS. *Priorista* of Buondelmonte. This important chronicle, forming a very large folio volume, is the property of Signore Pietro Bigazzi, Secretary of the Academia della Crusca; a gentleman, whose accurate and extensive knowledge of Italian history is as remarkable as the liberality with which he is ever ready to put the stores of his erudition at the service of students.

2.—Page 106.

The diarist Stefano Infessura, in his valuable chronicle of the events which occurred at Rome from A.D. 1294 to A.D. 1494, the latter years of which period are recorded with great and most amusing detail, says that the winds on the occasion of this memorable festival were gilt! He especially notes that sugar was lavishly used: a special indication of reckless extravagance.

In recording another equally magnificent festival given by the Cardinal to Leonora, daughter of King Ferrante, who passed through Rome on her way northwards to be married to the Duke of Ferrara, Infessura tells us that this Franciscan mendicant turned Cardinal caused the bedchamber of the princess and those of all the ladies of her court to be furnished with certain implements of a kind generally deemed more useful than ornamental, made of gold! "Oh! guarda," cries the historian, as he well might, "in quale cosa bisogna che si adoperi lo tesoro della Chiesa!" *Her. Ital. Script.* Tom III. Pars. II. p. 1144.

3.—Page 108.

Some discrepancies in the accounts of these transactions and the dates of them in the contemporary historians have led Burriel into supposing that the Cardinal Riario made two journeys to Milan, the first in 1472, and the second in 1473, and that on both occasions he arrived there on the 12th of September. The first journey however is, as far as I can find from a careful examination of the authorities, wholly imaginary. The difficulty seems to have been, that Corio represents Girolamo Riario, the proposed bridegroom, to have been invested with the County of Imola on the 6th of November, 1472. And it is difficult to suppose that this could have been done before all the conditions of the marriage were finally arranged, which they certainly were not till after the Cardinal's journey to Milan. But Corio is a very untrustworthy guide as far as dates are concerned. Another blunder of his in the very passage, in which he tells of Imola having been given to Girolamo Riario as Catherine's dower, might have put Burriel on his guard. When the marriage was determined on, he says, the Duke "gave her Imola for her dower. . . . After that—*dipoi*—on the 20th of August, Borso of Este, Marquis of Ferrara, died." Now that prince died on the 27th of May, 1471.

Muratori (ad ann. 1473), quoting Platina assigns the true date of 1473 to Girolamo's investiture of the County of Imola; but supposed that that principality was purchased by the Cardinal of the Manfredi

family for forty thousand ducats, and given by him to his brother. But as to this point of the story Burriel must be considered to be correct. For he says, that the conditions of the marriage, including the giving Imola as the bride's dower, "are proved by Catherine's last Will and Testament, which we have before us, and by Filippo of Bergamo in his life of the Count, and by Andrea Bernardi in his chronicle, both of whom were contemporary writers." The notion of the sum of forty thousand ducats having been paid by the Riarios for Imola seems to have arisen from the fact, that that sum was by the marriage contract stipulated to be paid down by the Pope.*

It is remarkable that the two most notable historians of Milan in recent times, Verri and Rosmini, are both wholly silent as to the marriage of Catherine, the negotiations with the Cardinal Riario on that subject, and the acquisition of Imola.

Count Pietro Verri died in 1797, leaving his History of Milan incomplete. It has been often reprinted, and has been always highly esteemed by his fellow countrymen.

The four bulky and handsome 4to. volumes of the Cavaliere Carlo de' Rosmini on the History of Milan were printed in 1820; and have taken the rank of a standard work.

Bernardino Corio, "gentleman of Milan," was one of Duke Maria Galeazzo's pages and chamberlains; and in that part of his history, therefore, which touches our subject, is an eyewitness of what he relates. Should any reader have the curiosity to refer to the amusing pages of this old writer, he must take care to look at the edition printed at Padua, in one vol. 4to, 1646. That printed at Venice in the same form about half a century earlier is grossly incomplete. For instance, the whole of the interesting description of the Duke's gorgeous cavalcade, from which the text is taken, is omitted in the Venice edition.

4.—Page 115.

The original text of this Roman lampoon is given here from Corio, that the classical reader may see more specifically what were the vices attributed to this pillar of the Church, than an English page can venture to catalogue them.

"Omne scelus fugiat Latia modo procul aburbe,
Et virtus, probitas, imperet atque pudor.

* See also, in support of the view taken in the text, "Historia di Forlimpopoli, di Matteo Vecchiazzani." Forlimpopoli, 1647. Page 140. Also, "Compendio della Storia della Città d' Imola; da Giuseppe Alberghetti." Imola, 1810. Page 248-9.

Fur, scortum, leno, mechus, pedica, cynedus,
 Et scurra, et phidicen cedat ab Italia.
 Namque illa Ausonii pestis scelerata Senatus
 Petrus ad infernas est modo raptus aquas."

The original of the eulogistic epitaph given by Burriel, which has at least the merit of brevity, runs thus :—

"Ante annos scivisse nocet ; nam maxima virtus
 Persuasit mortî, ut crederit esse senem."

5.—Page 120.

A curious example of the audacious cynicism of this Milanese despot—and, to be just, we must add, to a great degree, of the time in which he lived—is to be found in certain documents of that period printed by Rossini in the appendices to his history. The following condition, which we must be permitted to leave in its original latin, is found in a deed of gift to a lady named Lucia Marliana, wife of Ambrogio dei Reverti. It was duly and formally executed before a notary public, and then preserved among the other state papers and archives of the Duchy.

"Quamquidem donationem," it runs : "Valere volumus ut supra dummodo prædicta Lucia cum marito suo per carnalem copulam se non commisceat *sine nostrâ speciali licenciâ in scriptis*, nec cum alio viro rem habeat, exceptâ personâ nostrâ, si forte cum eâ coire aliquando libuerit. * * * * Speramus tamen ipsam ita victuram et sese habituram in devotione et hac monitione nostra promerito ab omni suspicione de concubitu mariti sine nostrâ licenciâ."

Rosmini intimates that it appears that these conditions were duly observed. Perhaps he means only that we may conclude them to have been so from the fact that the deed of gift was not disturbed. It was indeed followed by many others of the most preposterous prodigality, to such an extent that the Lady Lucia Marliana became one of the wealthiest individuals in all Lombardy.

6.—Page 124.

The particulars of female costume mentioned in the text are taken from a very valuable and curious chronicle, printed by Muratori in the 16th vol. of his collection. See *Rer. Ital. Scrip. T. 16. p. 50 et seq.* It is the Chronicon Placentinum by Johannes de Mussis, citizen of Placentia. He is a vehement *laudator temporis acti* ; and laments the degeneracy and increasing luxury of his day in the well known tone of the moralists of any age. The passage is so curious that I am tempted

to translate a considerable portion for the amusement of those who are not likely to seek the original in the vast treasure-house of Muratori.

“In the good old time,” says John de Mussis, “man and wife at supper eat out of one dish. The use of carved wooden utensils at table was unknown. One or two cups for drinking served the whole family. Those who supped at night lighted the table with torches held in the hand of a boy or servant; for candles of tallow or of wax were not in use. The men wore cloaks of skin, or of wool, or of hemp. Women at their marriage wore tunics of hemp. Coarse were then the fashions both for men and women. Of gold or silver little or none was seen in the dress. There was no luxury in food. Men of the people eat fresh meat thrice a-week. Then for dinner they eat herbs and garden produce, which had been boiled with the meat; and made their supper of the meat put by for that purpose. The use of wine in the summer was not general. Men deemed themselves rich with a small amount of money. Small were the cellars in those days; and the larders no bigger. Women were content to marry with a small dowry, because their mode of life was excessively frugal. Virgins before their marriage were content with a hempen tunic, which was called a ‘sotana,’ (the modern Italian word for a petticoat) and a linen* garment called a ‘socca.’ Virgins wore no costly head-dresses. Matrons bound their temples, cheeks, and chin with broad fillets. * * * * Now the old customs are superseded by many indecorous usages. But especially for the destruction of souls has parsimony been changed for luxury. Clothes are seen of exquisite material and workmanship, and ornamented to excess. We have silver and gold and pearls in cunning devices; fringes of wonderful breadth, linings of silk varied with foreign and costly skins. Incitements to gluttony are not wanting. Foreign wines are drunk. Drinking is almost universal. Sumptuous dishes are publicly used. Cooks are held in high honour. Every sort of provocative to gluttony and greed is in request. And avarice is called into play for the purpose of supplying the means for all this. Hence come usury, frauds, rapaciousness, robbery, exiles, domestic broils, unlawful profits, oppression of the innocent, the extermination of families, and banishment of the rich. We say ‘our God is our belly.’ We return to the pomps which we have renounced in our baptism, and are deserters from God to the devil. And were it not that the clergy edify us by their pure examples, there would soon be no limit to our luxury and ambition. * * * * Our ladies wear long

* The words in the original are “paludamentum” and “soccam” on neither of which does Ducange throw any satisfactory light.

and large robes of crimson silk velvet, or of cloth of silk, brocaded with gold, or of cloth of gold, or of simple cloth of silk, of cloth of scarlet or crimson wool, or other costly cloths. And these cloths of purple stuff, or of velvet, or of cloth of gold or brocade cost for a mantle or gown from 25 up to 40 golden florins or ducats. * * * * And on some of these dresses there are large and deep fringes of gold around the collar, which encircles the throat, for all the world like the spiked collar round the neck of a dog. On others there are put from three to five ounces of pearls, worth ten golden florins an ounce. And they wear small hoods with large golden fringes, or with rows of pearls around the said hoods. And they go girt about the waist with handsome girdles of gilt silver, or of pearls, worth about 25 golden florins the girdle. Sometimes no girdle is worn. And every lady has trinkets of gold and precious stones to the value of from 30 to 50 golden florins.

“Some, however, of these dresses are decorous, because they do not expose the bosom. But they have other indecent dresses, which are called Ciprians; these are made extremely large towards the feet, and close-fitting from the waist upwards, with long and large sleeves, like those described above. They are of similar cost also, and are adorned with jewels of equal value. And they are ornamented in front, from the neck to the feet, with bosses of silver-gilt or of pearls. And these Ciprians have the opening around the neck so large that they show the bosom, et videtur, quod dictæ manillæ velint exire de sinu earum. Which dresses would be magnificent, if they did not expose the bosom, and if the collar was so decently close that at least the breast should not be visible to every body. These ladies also wear in their head-dresses jewels of great price. For instance, some wear coronets of silver-gilt, or of pure gold, adorned with pearls and precious stones, to the value of from 70 to 100 golden florins. And others wear ‘*terzollas*’ of large pearls, worth from 100 to 125 golden florins. Which ‘*terzollas*’ are so called, because they are made of 300 great pearls, and because they are made and ranged in three tiers. These ladies, too, in the place of the chaplets of gold or of silk, which they used to wear twined in the hair of their head, now wear supports for the hair, ‘*bugulos*,’ as they are called, which they cover with their hair tied over the said ‘*bugulos*,’ with braiding of silk or of gold, or with silver braiding covered with pearls.”

The chronicler then describes the dress of grave matrons and that of widows. The fashions of the young men give as much, or more, offence to the writer as those of the ladies, for reasons, which the curious must seek in the very plain speaking and exceedingly barbarous Latin of John de Mussis’ own pages.

One or two other particulars, however, are worth noting. All persons of both sexes, both in summer and in winter, wear shoes, and sometimes hose with soles, or shoes having points three inches long beyond the feet. Ladies and young men wear chains of silver-gilt, or pearls or coral, around their necks. The said youths—these exquisites of Placentia, who have been dust these four hundred years—used to shave their beard, and their hair below the ears, wearing it above that line frizzed and puffed out to as large a circumference as possible. “And some keep one horse, and some two, and some five, et aliqui nullum tenent,”—which naïf-ly lame conclusion puts one in mind of the French bard’s description of Marlborough’s funeral cortège :

“L’un portait se cuirasse;—L’autre son bouclier;
L’un portait son grand sabre;—L’autre ne portait rien !”

The Placentian youths, who kept horses, our author goes on to tell us, kept grooms also, whose wages were twelve golden florins a-year. Maid-servants had seven golden florins and their food, but not their clothes.

The citizens, too, we are told, make very good cheer. At festivals, especially at marriage feasts, they drink good wine, both white and red. The beginning of the banquet always consists of confections of sugar. The first course is generally formed of one or two capons, and “on each trencher a large piece of meat stewed with almonds and sugar, and spices and other good things.” Then boiled meat is served “in magnâ quantitate;” capons, chickens, pheasants, partridges, hares, wild boars, kids, and other meat, according to the time of year. After that, tarts and cakes, with spun sugar on them, are set forth. A copious description of supper, as distinguished from dinner, follows, in which the principal peculiarity seems to be the prevalence of various meats in the form of “gelatine.” Supper always ends with fruit,—written always “fluges,” indicating a mode of pronunciation still common among the Italian peasantry, who, to the present day, rhyme “molta” to “porta.” After the “fluges” comes the following conclusion, several times repeated by the methodical old chronicler, in the same words: “Et post lotis manibus, antequam tabulæ levantur, dant bibere, et confectum zuchari, et post bibere.” In Lent they begin with the same formulary, minus the hand-washing; then come figs and peeled almonds; then large fishes, “à la poivrade,”—“*ad piperatum* ;” then rice soup with milk of almonds, and sugar and spices, and salted eels. After these, boiled pike are served with vinegar sauce, or mustard sauce, or cooked with wine and spices. Then nuts and other fruit; to end with “Et post lotis manibus,” &c., *da capo*.

It will be observed, that these luxurious citizens of Placenza had no

sea fish to help out their Lenten diet. Communications were too slow and difficult.

A curious description of household furniture follows, which I am deterred from giving only by the fear of increasing this already long note to a wholly unconscionable bulk. The curious will do well to refer to it. The construction of fire-places in the houses is noted as an especial sign of increasing luxury. They have linen curtains, too, around their beds. Many even are so luxuriously magnificent, that they "faciunt duas ignes, unum in caminata, et alium in coquina. Et multi tenent bonas confectiones in domibus eorum de zucharo et de melle. Quæ omnia sunt magnarum expensarum."

These are the causes, concludes this admirer of the good old times, why dowers must needs be given to daughters of four or five hundred golden florins and more; which are then all expended by the bridegroom in dressing the bride, and in nuptial festivities. "And he, who married the said bride, spends, besides the dower, some hundred of golden florins in renovating some of the bride's clothes."

And to meet all these expenses, he says, it must needs be that men seek to make money by unlawful means. Thus are reduced to poverty many, who strive to do what is incompatible with their means.

All very bad certainly; and though the author does not tell us whether any of these extravagant fifteenth-century gentry were directors of Placenza banks, it is probable enough that they were something of the sort. But then all this was four hundred years ago: and the world must have grown wiser since then!

7.—Page 132.

I find this characteristic fact stated in a curious and rare volume on "the History of the Pontifical golden Rose." "La Rosa d'ora Pontificia. Raconto Storico. 1 Vol. 4to. In Roma, 1681." There is a chronological index of all the personages and churches to whom the Rose has been presented, from which I gather that this mark of Apostolic favour has fallen to the lot of England five times in the course of ages. The first was given to Henry IV., by Eugenius IV. The second to Henry VIII., by Leo X. The third to Henry VIII., by Clement VII. The fourth to Queen Mary, by Julius III. The fifth was sent to Queen Henrietta, by Urban VIII., with a message to the effect, that "since that kingdom had fallen from the faith by means of a woman * mere triciously adorned with roses incarnadined by the polluted blood of

* Anne Boleyn, whom Rome always deems to have been the sole cause of England's heresy.

Venus, it might now be recalled and restored to the faith by a royal lady of infinite piety, holily ornamented with this rose grown in the odoriferous gardens of Holy Church, and watered by dews and streams of the fructifying blood of martyrs!!”

It is strange that the only individual to whom the golden rose was ever given a second time, was the most fatal enemy of the Church, Henry VIII.

8.—Page 133.

Crimson, scarlet, and purple were the favorite colours. Any fabric dyed with these cost in the proportion of eighteen to twelve for stuffs of other colours. Ducange ad voc. “Granum;” where he cites Rymer for the above fact. Granum is the French “cramoisi;” Angl. “crimson:” but Ducange seems uncertain whether the dye in question were cochineal, or a vegetable product.

9.—Page 151.

Among the smaller punishments incurred by some of those more or less implicated in these conspiracies, it is worth noting that one well-to-do citizen was fined ninety lire, and all his household furniture, estimated at fifty lire more. This sum may be probably considered as equivalent to about £20 sterling at the present day, and does not give a very favourable idea of the amount of domestic comfort existing among the citizens. Another conspirator was fined an hundred lire, and “all his rich and precious furniture was confiscated.” In this case the estimated value is not mentioned. But as the amount of the fine is nearly the same, it is probable that the culprit belonged to about the same sphere of society.

10.—Page 159.

The classical reader may, if curious in such matters, turn to Muratori’s columns for the strangely cynical, and wholly unreproducible language, in which Infessura relates the incident. I have written “classical,” which is generally understood to mean Latin or Greek readers. And a large portion of Infessura’s chronicle is written in very barbarous Latin. But portions, without any apparent reason for the change, are written in Italian. And the passage in question occurs in one of those portions.

11.—Page 190.

The narrative in the text follows the statement of Bonoli and Burriel, which has also all the probabilities of the case to support it. Other historians represent Catherine herself to have come out on the ramparts, and to have turned a deaf ear to the piteous entreaties of her children, that she would give up the fortress, and so save their lives. Some of these writers also recount a tale, which suited as it is to the taste of the vulgar for what is striking, coarsely coloured, and gross, has become the most popularly known incident of Catherine's career. When threatened with the immediate destruction of her children before her eyes, she is said to have replied, in terms more coarse than can be repeated here, that others might come whence those had come, and to have accompanied the assertion by gestures yet more undecipherable on an English page.

There is every reason to believe that the whole of this story is an invention. But it is an invention nearly contemporaneous with the events; and, given as it is by its inventors by no means as a blameable trait in the heroine's character, but rather as a proof of commendable energy and vigorous courage, it is curious as an indication of the prevailing manners and feelings of the period.

12.—Page 223.

"Pantaloons does not probably properly express the meaning of 'calze.'" The chronicler means those elastic-knitted garments of silk or wool for the lower half of the person, trowsers and stockings in one, which sat tight to the limb, and the appearance of which is familiar to the eyes of those acquainted with the pictures of the time, especially the great festival paintings of the Venetian school.

13.—Page 264.

This very curious and interesting volume is the property of Signore Pietro Bigazzi, mentioned in a previous note. It was written by Lucantonio Cuppano, secretary to Catherine's son, Giovanni delle Bandenere, who assures us that he copied it from the MS. in Catherine's own hand.

NOTES TO THE LIFE OF VITTORIA COLONNA.

1.—Page 293.

Guiliano Passeri, the author of the diary quoted in the text, was an honest weaver, living by his art at Naples, in the time of Ferdinand of Spain and Charles V. His work appears to have been composed wholly for his own satisfaction and amusement. The entire work is written in the form of a diary. But as the first entry records the coming of Alphonso I. to Naples, on "this day the 26th February, 1443;" and the last describes the funeral of the Marchese di Pescara, Vittoria's husband, on the 12th May, 1526, it is difficult to suppose that these could have been the daily jottings of one and the same individual, extending over a period of 83 years, although it is *possible* that they may have been so. As the work ends quite abruptly, it seems reasonable to suppose that it was carried on till the death of the writer. The probability is, that the memorials of the earlier years are due to another pen. The work is written in Neapolitan dialect, and concerns itself very little with aught that passed out of Naples. It has all the marks of being written by an eye-witness of the circumstances recorded. The accounts especially of all public ceremonies, gala-doings, etc., are given in great detail, and with all the gusto of a regular sight-seer. And the book is interesting as a rare specimen of the writing and ideas of an artisan of the 16th century.

It was printed in a 4to volume at Naples in 1785, and is rather rare.

2.—Page 319.

These false ducats gave rise, we are told, to the king's saying, that his wife had brought him three gifts:—

Faciem pictam,
Monetam fictam,

to which the ungallant and brutal royal husband added another, the statement of which ending in "strictam," is so grossly coarse, that it cannot be repeated here, even with the partial veil of its Latin clothing.

3.—Page 332.

The translations of the sonnets in the text have been given solely with the view of enabling those, who do not read Italian, to form some

idea of the subject-matter and mode of thought of the author, and not with any hope or pretension of presenting anything that might be accepted as a tolerable English sonnet. In many instances the required continuation of the rhyme has not even been attempted. If it be asked, why then were the translations not given in simple prose, which would have admitted a yet greater accuracy of literal rendering?—it is answered, that a translation so made would be so intolerably bald, flat, and silly-sounding, that a still more unfavourable conception of the original would remain in the English reader's mind than that, which it is hoped may be produced by the more or less poetically cast translations given. The originals, printed in every instance, will do justice (if not more) to our poetess in the eyes of those acquainted with her language, for the specimens chosen may be relied on as being not unfavourable specimens. And many readers, probably, who might not take the trouble to understand the original in a language they imperfectly understand, may yet, by the help of the translation, if they think it worth while, obtain a tolerable accurate notion of Vittoria's poetical style.

4.—Page 379.

When Mr. Harford heard these letters read, the exceedingly valuable and interesting museum of papers, pictures, drawings, etc. of Michael Angelo, was the property of his lineal descendant, the late minister of public instruction in Tuscany. When dying, he bequeathed this exceedingly important collection to the "Comunità," or corporation of Florence. The Tuscan law requires that the notary who draws a will, should do so *in the presence of the testator*. Unfortunately, on the sick man complaining of the heat of the room, the notary employed to draw this important instrument, retired, it seems, into the next room, which, as a door was open between the two chambers, he conceived was equivalent to being in presence of the testator, as required by law. It has been decided, however, by the tribunals of Florence, that the will was thus vitiated, and that the property must pass to the heirs at law. An appeal still pending (September 1858) lies to a higher court; but there is every reason to believe that the original judgment must be confirmed. In the mean time, the papers, etc., are under the inviolable seal of the law.

5.—Page 383.

The MS. of François de Holland, containing the notices of Vittoria Colonna, given in the text, is to be found translated into French, and

printed in a volume entitled, "Les Arts en Portugal, par le Comte A. Raczynski. Paris, 1846."

My attention was directed to the notices of Vittoria to be found in this volume, by a review of M. Deumier's book on our poetess, by Signor A. Reumont, inserted in the fifth volume of the new series of the "Archivio Storico Italiano; Firenze, 1857," p. 138.

6.—Page 390.

The prayer written by Vittoria Colonna is as follows :—

"Da, precor, Domine, ut eâ animi depressione, quæ humilitati meæ convenit, eâque mentis elatione, quam tua postulat celsitudo, te semper adorem ; ac in timore, quem tua incutit justitia, et in spe, quam tua clementia permittit, vivam continue, meque tibi uti potentissimo subjiciam, tanquam sapientissimo disponam, et ad te ut perfectissimum et optimum convertar. Obsecro, Pater Pientissime, ut me ignis tuus vivacissimus depuret, lux tua clarissima illustret, et amor tuus ille sincerissimus ita proficiat ut ad te nullo mortalium rerum obice detenta, felix redeam et segura."

END OF VOLUME I.

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