MASTER ADAM, THE CALABRIAN

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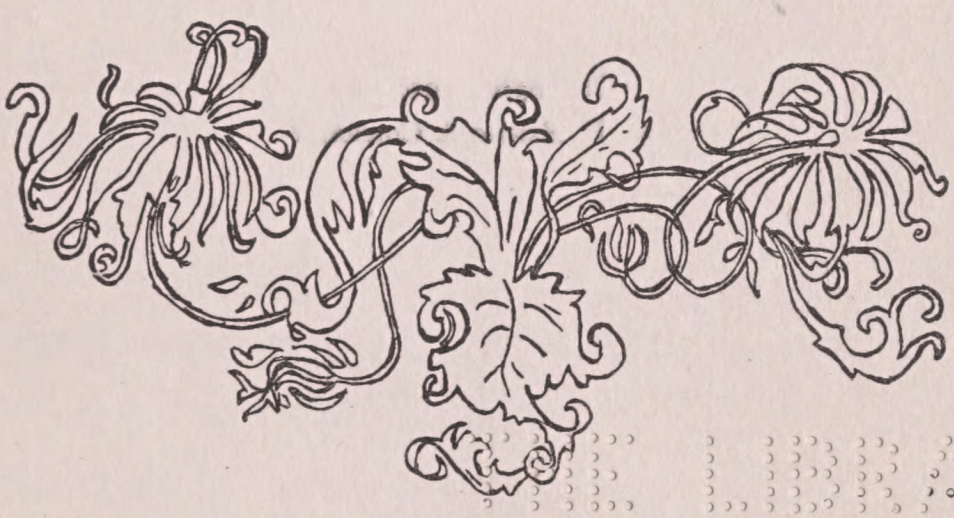
By ALEXANDRE DUMAS

Translated by HARRY A. SPURR



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PREFACE

In asking the public to accept the original of the following translation as a "genuine Dumas," I am aware that some explanation and justification is necessary. So much of what is attributed to Dumas was obviously written by the vastly inferior pens of his apprentices, that publishers and public alike have grown shy. The position was made worse recently by the issue of two stories, previously well known to students of Dumas, which purported to be newly discovered and translated. The situation is further confused by the fact that eminent firms publish under his name romances, such as the "Two Dianas," which were notoriously not written by Dumas at all.

I can offer two kinds of proof, both necessarily circumstantial and inferential, in support of the genuineness of "Master Adam." It is not easy, even for the student, to trace the origin of all this fertile

writer's productions, and we shall probably never quite know, from legal, indisputable proof, exactly what he did write, or inspire, and what he did not.

"Master Adam" is translated from an edition of Dumas, published in Brussels, and assuming to be a complete, chronologically published edition of his writings. It bears date 1840—the year in which the story first appeared. Dumas visited Naples in 1835, and if we are to believe our author, in his last chapter, he heard the leading incidents of the story from the lips of a guide. These were the days before the great author's labors had multiplied and led him to keep a staff—he was now half way between his dramatic and his romantic successes. No doubt he "wrote the story up" from the material thus afforded him.

The other kind of proof is stronger, and is contained in the matter and manner of the narrative itself. The translator has been unfortunate indeed, if he has not reconveyed at least some of the sly humor in "Master Adam." The incidents of the speaking Madonna, of Fra Bracalone's foretaste of purgatory, of *compère* Matteo and the three sous, and lastly of Saint Philomela's miracle—all these,

to the palate cultivated by the best romances of Dumas, are recognizable as his own. An excellent example of the true and the "false" Dumas is afforded by the volume of Messrs. Dent's admirable series, containing "The Brigand," and " Blanche de Beaulieu." The reader, passing from the former, which is "journeyman Dumas," to the latter, which is the real article, will instantly perceive the difference. If he does not, no arguments of mine can convince him of the genuineness of the following story.

HARRY A. SPURR.

MASTER ADAM THE CALABRIAN

CHAPTER I

THE SPEAKING MADONNA

If our readers feel any curiosity respecting the future events of the truthful history which we are about to tell them, they must have the kindness to follow us to Calabria, a province to which we have already taken them twice—once to relate the adventures of Cherubino and Celestini; and on the other occasion, to be present at the death of Murat.

Calabria is a magnificent country; in the summer it roasts you as thoroughly as if you were in Timbuctoo; in the winter it freezes you as uncompromisingly as St. Petersburg does. Further, one does

not reckon time there as one does in other countries, by years, by lustres or by centuries, but by earthquakes.

In spite of this, few people are so attached to their country as the Calabrians. This is due, no doubt, to the fact that the surface which covers this volcanic land is most picturesque; its valleys are as fertile as gardens; its mountains as well wooded as forests. From time to time, above the tops of the chestnut trees which dominate the view, one catches a glimpse of a ruddy peak towering into the sky like a column of granite scarred by the lightning, and the traveller fancies that he is drawing nigh to some dwelling of the Cyclops.

It is true that in this beautiful and prosperous country one cannot be sure that either its prosperity or its beauty will last. Etna and Vesuvius have never seriously accepted the separation between Sicily and the mainland, and these two old friends have preserved such frequent subterranean relations with each other as to prove that the very best understanding exists between them. As a result, every time they place themselves in communication with each other the peninsula skips like the little hills in

Scripture,* not with joy but with terror; the valleys expand into mountains, the mountains sink into valleys, and towns disappear into some gulf, which closes as soon as it opens, so that the eagle, soaring above an earth which is for the moment as unstable and agitated as the sea which surrounds it, no longer recognizes the Calabria of yesterday. In a night the face of the earth is changed, from Reggio as far as Pastum. It is the Almighty's terrible kaleidoscope.

Thanks to the mobility of the soil on which they live, the Calabrians not only possess no history, (for it is very rarely that the archives of one century descend intact to the next), but there are even people who know neither their age nor their name. These, as children, have escaped almost alone from the catastrophe which overwhelmed the rest of their village; and if the barbers who brought them into the world or the priests who baptized them have not survived, there are no means of learning any facts about their origin. Such a child, when older, may pick up here and there some vague ideas respecting the time when it was born, and the family to which it belonged, from people of the surrounding villages; but its true

* Psalms, cxiv, 4.

age dates from the time of the earthquake, and its real family is that which has adopted it.

Master Adam, the hero of our story, was a living example of the reality of these strange occurrences.

If our readers wish to make the acquaintance of this estimable person, to whom we are going to call their protracted attention, they have only to cast their eyes upon the steep and rugged road which leads from Nicotera to Monteleone. They will see there, marching gaily along under the hot August sun, a man of from fifty to fifty-five years of age, dressed in velvet jacket and trousers, whose original color is exceedingly difficult to detect, owing to the different layers of paint which have successively covered it. The pocket of his fob contains, instead of the ordinary knife which his fellow-countrymen are in the habit of carrying, some much more pacific weapons, to wit, a bundle of brushes and pencils of all sizes, whilst round his belt, in place of pistols, he carries a varied assortment of the crude and glaring colors which his primitive clients prefer to the softer and more artistic tints.

A gourd is slung from his neck like a bandolier, containing, however, neither Lipari nor Catanzaro

wine, but gummed water, which serves the double purpose of quenching his thirst a trifle more palatably than ordinary water, and of helping to fix his vermilion or indigo tint a little more permanently. The cane with which he is armed, and which, like the national carbine, he carries across his shoulder with such a martial air, is nothing more alarming than the innocent wand which painters call a maulstick.

This man, whose form is so athletic, whose step is so light and free, and whose glance is so careless and merry, was found on the 21st of July, 1764, a naked and howling baby, on the roadside a quarter of a league from the village of Maida, a hamlet which had disappeared the previous night, like one of those cursed cities over which the wrath of God has passed. Rescued by the peasants of Nicotera, but too young to tell them how he had come there, he was given, no doubt in commemoration of his obscure origin, the name of the first of men.

We have now to complete our explanation of his name, by explaining how and when he received the dignifying title of "Master."

Young Adam, whose years were dated from the day of his discovery, and who therefore robbed Time

of a year or eighteen months, had been at first destined by his adopted parents for a shepherd's life—a post of responsibility in a territory like Calabria, where wool forms, with oil, the sole riches of the country. But he was not long in showing how little taste he possessed for the pleasures of that pastoral life so poetically dear to Theocritus. Instead he, like Giotto, found pleasure in sketching on the sand outlines of men, trees and animals, and if the studio of a second Cimabue had been open to him, perhaps he too would have become a great artist. Unhappily, the master was lacking for this pupil, and, lacking the opportunity to study and to develop his natural powers, young Adam remained a "dauber" all his life.

But to call him a "dauber" is to look at the matter solely from the point of view of "high art," and although the worthy painter whom we have treated thus disrespectfully would probably be despised in Paris, London or Rome, he was, for his place and people, a very distinguished artist, whose productions enjoyed at one time such a reputation that the Neapolitan police felt themselves obliged to interfere. How our hero came to cause such anxiety to those paternal authorities we may here relate.

Master Adam, by virtue of a number of more or less picturesque signboards which he had decorated, had already merited his honorable prefix, when the counter-revolution of 1798 occurred. Ferdinand and Carolina, pursued by the French, had retired to Sicily under the protection of Nelson, and transferring the seat of government to Palermo, had abandoned Naples to Champronnet, who forthwith proclaimed the Parthenopean Republic.

Unhappily for the newly enfranchised Neapolitans, the half-dethroned king found in one of his court, Cardinal Ruffo, a man of resolution, who undertook to win back the throne for its legitimate monarch. He landed in Calabria, and in the name of the Holy Faith summoned to his side all who remained faithful to old Royalist principles. Five or six hundred men gathered at the first call, and the audacious cardinal judged that this force would be sufficient. As he needed only a flag round which to rally his soldiers before taking to the field, he asked for an artist to paint on his standard the image of our Lady of Mount Carmel, to whose protection he had committed his enterprise.

Master Adam was at this time in the prime of

his life and his talent. He confidently offered his services to Ruffo, and executed the Madonna required with a promptitude and enthusiasm which satisfied his leader both as churchman and politician. The general-and-prelate offered, in his double capacity, to give the artist such rewards, temporal and spiritual, as he might desire. For the first, Master Adam begged for the cardinal's benediction; and for the second, the sole right of painting Madonnas and souls-in-purgatory on all the white walls for ten leagues round.

This double request, audacious as it appeared to the listeners, was instantly granted, and when Ruffo had reconquered the kingdom and recalled his royal master and mistress, Master Adam, who had contributed with all his might to this end, enjoyed without dispute the privilege which his patriotism and fidelity had won for him.

Such of our readers as have traveled through Italy and observed the devotion shown by the Neapolitan and Calabrian peasantry for holy images and portraits, will easily comprehend the importance of Master Adam's monopoly. Every convent which desired to have a new Madonna painted, or an old

one "touched up," was obliged to have recourse to our artist. But Master Adam, as he possessed no rival, imposed conditions which took the form of a right to make a collection before the holy image, along with the sacristan of the convent, during a period of time to be fixed by friendly arrangement between the parties.

The souls in torment formed another source of profit. Directly a rich peasant died, whatever might chance to be Heaven's intentions respecting the soul, whether it was destined for hell or paradise, Master Adam placed it provisionally in purgatory. Accordingly, in one of his mural purgatories, amongst the crowd of heads which protruded above the flames, stretching their hands toward Heaven, this pitiless Minos added a head and pair of hands—a head so faithful in likeness, and a pair of hands so contracted with agony, that the relations of the departed would have lacked the bowels of compassion if they had grudged prayers and alms to a soul which pleaded for them in so palpable and public a manner.

As a result, the heirs, more for their own honor than for the solace of the defunct, were forced to pay the curé for masses, and to give alms to the

artist. Each of these did his duty conscientiously; every morning the curé said mass, and every night the painter extinguished a flame or removed a line of pain from the face of the damned one; and in proportion as the heirs fulfilled their charitable duty, the expression on the face passed successively and visibly from the despair of the lost soul to the ecstatic smile of the blessed. Masses having been duly said, and alms bestowed, the dead would one day take to itself wings—a last effort of generosity—and on the morrow the place of the tormented one was empty. Delivered by the piety of those whom he had left on earth, the happy soul had entered into heaven.

For about ten years Master Adam faithfully followed his innocent industry without any disagreement, save with those whom his clerical associates had raised up against him, and who pretended sometimes that souls in purgatory needed only masses, and could very well dispense with the fees to the artist.

At the end of that time Fra Bracalone, sacristan of the church of Nicotera, came on behalf of the prior to beg Master Adam to "touch up" an old plaster Madonna which had been painted on the wall of

an immense garden adjoining the village street, and opposite the church. This Madonna had at one time performed miracles, but owing, no doubt, to her discontent with the neglect into which she had been allowed to fall, she had ceased for over ten years to give any sign of life.

The prior's motive in this act of piety was not entirely unconnected with the fear with which a certain brigand named Marco Brandi had inspired the people of lower Calabria, and in particular of Nicotera, in which district, it was suspected, he had established his headquarters. The churchwardens of Nicotera decided, at this crisis, to do something for the saint, in order that the grateful saint should, in turn, do something for the village. At the same time, and for greater security, they had despatched an express to the judge at Monteleone, making him acquainted with the state of affairs, and asking for a force of gendarmes.

Master Adam set about his work with a truly Christian ardor. Under his brush the face of the Madonna assumed its wonted freshness ; her aureole became visible once more, and her garments renewed their coloring. All the time he was painting Master

Adam maintained around him a circle of the curious, whose sustained interest showed the importance which the villagers attached to the devotional work which was being accomplished before their eyes. The work once finished, every one complimented the artist, who responded to their praises with a modesty which was all the more praiseworthy since he fully shared the opinions of the lookers-on in their high estimation of the merit of his work.

For his part the judge at Monteleone had responded to the cry of distress from his subordinates with such thoroughness that Nicotera could soon count on protection temporal as well as spiritual.

No sooner had they arrived than the brave gendarmes took to the hills, and having dislodged Marco Brandi from an excellent position, where he had indeed been preparing to take up his winter quarters, they dispersed his troop and pursued the chief himself with such energy that Brandi, hemmed in between the soldiery and the villagers, had barely time to hide himself in a little forest of chestnut trees adjoining the garden wall of the abbey itself.

At once, by a movement as skillful as it was rapid, the wood was surrounded and searched throughout

its length and breadth, but without success. Marco Brandi had disappeared. Every tree, every shrub, was inspected, but in vain; though not even a tuft of grass had escaped its prod of the bayonet. One was compelled to believe that there was something magical about the affair.

Eight days passed without any news of the brigand. Nevertheless, as every one knew that danger was imminent, the soldiers redoubled their vigilance, and the people their devotion.

Never was a Madonna so supplicated, pampered and flattered as Master Adam's Madonna. The richest peasants in the districts came in to bring her their earrings and necklaces, (which they fully intended to recover as soon as the brigand was arrested, but which they lent to the Madonna in the meantime). A lamp burnt night and day at her holy feet, and its care was confided to a pious woman called Sister Martha, who went every morning from house to house, begging for oil, and at night returned to pour into the receptacle the result of her collecting. This was always plentiful enough, so that the good woman was not called upon to provide any herself; on the contrary, everybody was glad to

press alms upon her, begging for a place in her prayers—for Sister Martha exhaled an odor of sanctity which extended for ten leagues round about. Like Saint Theresa, she saw visions; sometimes she would remain for a day, or even two days, extended on her bed, without movement, her eyes open, her face contracted. The doctor called this epilepsy: Fra Bracalone called it ecstasy.

Now, it happened that at this time Sister Martha was seized with one of her habitual attacks, and for forty-eight hours she was unable to attend to her customary duties on behalf of the Madonna. Nevertheless, such is the respect paid in Italy to the business rights of other people, that no woman, however sure of her own piety, dared to take Sister Martha's place, and during three-quarters of this time, the oil having become exhausted, the holy image remained unillumined.

It was toward the close of the second day. Night was coming on, swiftly and sombrely; the Ave Maria, the last hymn of twilight, was mounting to heaven; the streets were deserted, and with the exception of a cluster of children who were playing in front of the Madonna, every one was indoors.

Suddenly a voice, which seemed to come from the niche where the Virgin stood, was heard, speaking distinctly and sonorously, and calling by name the one of the little scamps who was nearest to her.

The astonished children turned round quickly.

"Paschariello!" said the voice a second time.

"What is it you want, Madonna?" asked the boy, trembling.

"Go say to Sister Martha," continued the voice, "that for two days she has neglected to put oil in my lamp."

Paschariello did not need to be told twice. He took to his heels, and followed by the rest of the lads, crying "Miracle! Miracle!" arrived pale and panting, and covered with perspiration, at Martha's house, at the moment when that holy woman was recovering consciousness after her lethargic trance of two days' duration.

Sister Martha listened in silence to all that the boy had to tell, and then, as if the power of memory were returning to her little by little, she declared before the crowd of neighbors that had gathered about her bed, attracted by the strange news, that the Virgin had just appeared to her also, and had spoken

to her the same words as those which Paschariello had repeated.

It was now not only the children who cried "Miracle!" but the whole village.

Sister Martha rose from her bed, in the midst of a chorus of acclamations, cries and singing, and took her way solemnly toward the sacred image. Paschariello, who had now become an object of public veneration, was carried in triumph on the shoulders of two vigorous Calabrians.

When at length the procession came face to face with the Madonna, Sister Martha bade the people cease chanting the litanies to the Virgin; and whilst Fra Bracalone and Master Adam, profiting by the occasion, made a collection, the one for the convent and the other for himself, the favored woman approached the image alone and conversed with it for some moments in a low voice.

At the close of this conversation, the result of which was eagerly awaited, Sister Martha turned toward her audience and declared, in the name of the Madonna, that the saint had just declared to her her mortification at finding the people of Nicotera so weak of faith. They had believed it their duty, as

protection against Marco Brandi, to add to the heavenly care of the all-powerful Virgin an ally so pitifully worldly and paltry as a troop of gendarmes. She refused entirely to be a party to such an alliance, declaring that the people must choose between means spiritual and means temporal. One could not be at the same time for the soldiers and for the Virgin; they must decide for themselves. If they were for the gendarmerie, she had not a word to say, for she had no desire to influence their consciences. Only, she would leave them to the gendarmes, and would not answer for the consequences. If, on the other hand, they were for her, she would be responsible for everything, and would answer for it that from that day for three years they should hear nothing more of Marco Brandi.

There was no doubt about the decision of the populace. Cries of "*Viva Madonna!* Down with the sbirri!" resounded on all sides, and the unhappy soldiers were recalled from their different posts, where they had watched for eight days with a courage and tenacity worthy of a better reward, and departed that night for Monteleone, accompanied by the hootings of the crowd, some of the people even

going so far as to suggest that the troops should be stoned.

Master Adam's Madonna accordingly remained in possession of the battlefield, and we must hasten to say, in her honor, that she had made no false promise, and that from that moment nothing more for three years was heard, in Nicotera or its neighborhood, of the terrible Marco Brandi.

CHAPTER II

THE POST-OFFICE

THE news of the miracle spread from Reggio to Cosenza and excited a general feeling of devotion toward the holy image. All the neighboring Madonnas endeavored, in their own behalf, to show that they, too, were not unworthy of attention. Some raised their arms; some turned up their eyes; others moved their lips; but not one of them spoke, and victory, therefore, was with the Madonna of Nicotera, and pilgrims came from all quarters of Calabria to see her.

After herself, the three most important persons in Calabria now were Paschariello, to whom she had first spoken; Sister Martha, who had spoken with her face to face as Moses did with Jehovah, and lastly Master Adam, who had restored the saint in a manner so delightful that she (no doubt in her joy at being thus renewed) had given the miraculous demonstration which we have just described. As for

Fra Bracalone, he found himself entirely eclipsed in the whole affair. His collections on behalf of the church were greatly resented, and this fall in his receipts inspired him with jealousy toward Master Adam, whose popularity for the moment cast a shadow upon his own.

The triumph of these three illustrious personages was as complete as possible. Paschariello until now had never attracted the slightest attention from the citizens, unless it was when some peasant, wearied of the young scamp's tricks, brought the sole of his foot or the palm of his hand into contact with some part or other of the youngster's body. The boy had roamed the streets of Nicotera all his little life, clothed in such rags as one must first see on the body of a Calabrian beggar before one can grasp the fact that there are creatures so wretched. These gentry clothe themselves in holes and fringes, in such a way they look as if they have carried away his web from the home of some gigantic spider.

Now Paschariello, dressed from head to foot at the expense of the public in the most gorgeous velvet which could be found in Monteleone, was exposed to public curiosity on a kind of scaffold, which was

erected opposite the Madonna who was the source of his good fortune. There he was honored with showers of oranges, pomegranates and chestnuts, the rinds and shells of which he returned to his faithful followers to be fought for as relics. Paschariello now saw before him, instead of a life of misery and toil such as that to which he had been born, a beautiful, rose-colored future, into which he threw himself recklessly and insolently, certain that sooner or later a career of life-long blessedness would succeed his very lenten boyhood.

Sister Martha had been by no means forgotten in the distribution of public gratitude. The favor which she appeared to enjoy in the estimation of the Madonna had entirely dispersed certain injurious rumors which the malicious and incredulous had circulated regarding her. It had previously been whispered that this excellent woman had at one time maintained business relations with the band of brigands led by Marco Brandi's father, a venerable old man who was now living at Cosenza, where he was ending his life amidst the respect of the people. (We shall recount later how, and under what circumstances, this respectable tradesman abandoned

with honor the career to which his son had succeeded.) But we do not wish to be led aside from our subject, and return accordingly to Sister Martha, whose reputation had at length triumphed over all evil reports, thanks to the patronage of the Madonna. She also shared with the holy image the prestige of having made certain cures; and it was she to whom the people usually applied for miracles of the second order.

Master Adam had now reached the highest pinnacle of glory to which an artist can attain. Since he had painted a Madonna who could speak, there was not a church in the province, however poor it might be, which did not wish to have one of the same kind. The artist now quoted his Virgins at ten crowns apiece, and in spite of this exorbitant charge he could not keep up with all the orders that he received.

A great change for the better took place in the little household of the painter—an improvement for which he was specially thankful, on account of his daughter, on whom he lavished all his affection. Whenever Gelsomina went out now, she was always dressed in such a style which might have raised

envy even in the breast of the Madonna herself. This was a great matter of scandal to Fra Bracalone, who took occasion at every opportunity to remark that it would end badly, and that the devil must be very stupid if he did not take advantage of this pride of the body to damn the young girl's soul forever.

It was not long, however, before Fra Bracalone's prediction came true, at least in part.

The tidings of the miracle spread on the one side to Naples, and on the other to Palermo; no one throughout the kingdom of the two Sicilies talked of anything else but the pilgrimages to the Madonna of Nicotera; and the government, observing the number of passports which were in demand for Monteleone, began to suspect that piety was not the only reason for this general emigration. They were not slow to perceive that the Carbonari had profited by the circumstance, and that out of the ten or twelve thousand passports issued for Calabria, more than three thousand had been applied for by individuals attached to the different branches of that brotherhood.

This took place in 1817, when Europe was begin-

ning to shake with revolutions, and Ferdinand, who had only just returned from exile, was not particularly anxious to go back. He sent three thousand men to Monteleone and three thousand to Tropea; and then, to get at the root of the mischief, he caused Paschariello to be sent to a house of correction, forced Sister Martha to enter a convent, and intimated to the Madonna his express command that she must not work any more miracles without his permission.

To the great astonishment of the people of Nicotera the Madonna obeyed. Further, the police (who have a mania for explaining everything, particularly the most inexplicable things) pretended that Sister Martha had confessed to the superior of the convent that she had renewed with Marco Brandi's troop the relations which she had formerly held with that of his father. They also declared (if it is not impious to repeat such stories) that young Brandi, pursued and forced to hide himself in the little wood, had climbed the wall which bordered it, and had hidden in the convent garden, where no one thought of looking for him.

This fact becoming known to Sister Martha, she

visited the Madonna every night, under pretense of pouring oil into the lamp, and although sentinels were placed on every side, she was able, thanks to the darkness, to hand food to the bandit through an opening in the wall. But Sister Martha fell ill, and the supply of provisions suddenly failed. Marco Brandi had waited patiently for two days, but at the end of that time he began to fear that he had escaped hanging only to die of hunger. He had therefore devised the trick of reminding Sister Martha (in his character of the Madonna) that for forty-eight mortal hours she had forgotten to "pour any oil into the lamp."

We have seen how fate had decreed that Sister Martha was able to obey the summons of the Madonna, and how that saint, by using the worthy woman as a mouthpiece, manifested her aversion for the respectable troop of gendarmerie—a prejudice on the part of the Virgin which surprised nobody, the gendarmes being generally known in Italy, as in France, by the nickname of "grippe-Jesus."

No one believed this story, just because it was the police who told it, for of course one never believes anything the police say; but false as no doubt

it was, it none the less did harm to the Madonna, and this evil effect naturally reflected upon Master Adam, her painter. The authorities had placed a sentinel before the image, with express instructions to disperse all assemblages composed of more than three persons. This order abolished collections at a blow.

For their part the convents, for fear of compromising themselves, canceled their contracts with the painter, and it was in vain that Master Adam lowered the price of his Madonnas, for the reduction served only to make him still more unpopular. It followed as a consequence that as, in the days of his prosperity, the honest man had shown no more foresight nor worldly wisdom than the grasshopper in the fable, he soon found himself as poor as ever, to the great satisfaction of Fra Bracalone, who, as we know, had prophesied some such catastrophe.

If Master Adam had been alone in the world he would have accepted this change in his fortunes with the careless disdain of an artist, or the calm resignation of a philosopher, but unhappily he had a wife, a son and a daughter. It is true that he did not trouble greatly on account of his wife, an excellent

creature, who was the living echo of all that was said to her, and who habitually repeated the last words of everybody's speech. Master Adam in marrying her had pledged himself to give her nothing more than her share of his joys and sorrows, and the contract which he had made at the altar he so religiously fulfilled that the poor woman had nothing to say, and so said nothing.

Their son, when very young, had felt a longing to enter the army, and had enlisted in the foot-artillery. After eight years' service, as his intelligence was fully equal to his enthusiasm, he had reached the rank of corporal. He had in the meantime exchanged his family name, which was far too pacific in sound, for the more formidable and expressive *nom de guerre* of "Bombarda." Master Adam, then, had no occasion to feel concern respecting his son and heir, who flourished exceedingly in the shelter of the barracks, and in the smoke of the cannon, fed and clothed by the government who kept him in barracks at Messina. All that it asked of him in return for his three halfpence a day was, that he should answer the roll-call morning and evening, and in leisure moments exchange a few saber-cuts

with the bandits of the neighboring villages, on the understanding that he should give as many as he could and take as few as possible, out of regard, not for his skin, but for the uniform which clothed it.

It was of Gelsomina, his dearly loved daughter, the model for his Madonnas, and for whom, in his ambitious fancy, he dreamed all the riches of the earth and all the blessings of heaven, that Master Adam now thought. Gelsomina had tasted for a moment that intoxicating elixir of life for which one longs so much, and which one regrets so poignantly when it is over. What would she do, that playful, headstrong, wayward child, without those golden needles, pearl earrings and coral necklaces, which had been as food and drink to her maiden pride? From her, above all, Master Adam hid his wretched state. He was afraid, in his father's heart, lest she should think his poverty a crime. Whatever suffering he felt in his soul, he always greeted Gelsomina with a smiling face, and was haunted by only one fear—that she should one day ask for something which he could not give her. One can imagine what would be his agony if the day ever

came when she would ask him in vain even for bread.

And yet the poor painter had come to that now.

On the morning of the day when we met him on the road from Nicotera, Gelsomina had awakened in an ecstasy of fraternal love and solicitude. For a long time they had received no news from Corporal Bombarda, and in one of those freaks of mood which were so habitual with her, Gelsomina suddenly felt a strange desire for some tidings of her brother. She had no sooner expressed this feeling in words, and spoken with confidence of the possibility that a letter from him was awaiting them at Monteleone, than Master Adam kissed his daughter's forehead, gave his wife his last few sous, so that the two women might make as good a breakfast as possible, and departed fasting, only too happy that his Nina had expressed a wish which a mere walk of ten leagues could gratify.

Master Adam had walked so well whilst we have been giving our readers these particulars that he had already reached Monteleone, and was climbing the hilly roads which led to the street where the post-office stood. When but a few yards from the spot

which he had walked so far to reach he stopped, took off his Grecian cap, scratched his bald pate, and appeared lost in thought.

Those who were not acquainted with the state of the painter's private finances might have thought that he was standing there lost in admiration of the quaint architecture of the curious structure which served the purpose of a post-office. It could easily have been taken for one of those houses which were miraculously transported by angels like that of Our Lady of Loretto; for, as if it had been suspended by iron bands from heaven rather than rooted in the soil of earth, it had stood firm against all the earthquakes which had convulsed Monteleone since its erection. Twenty times in the midst of a general eruption it had trembled as if in mortal terror; twenty times the stormy winds had shaken it to its foundations; but after every attack its crooked stories had been propped and strengthened, its frightful cracks had been filled in; and finally, its ague-fit over, it had remained, misshapen and decrepit, but surviving in the midst of surrounding ruin. At the deluge it would have floated like the ark; at Gomorrah it would have been incombustible;

and it seemed already doomed to defy the last day and give the lie direct to the Apocalypse.

After staring thus vacantly for a moment lost in thought, Master Adam's eye suddenly sparkled; a look of inspiration dawned upon his face, and a disdainful smile of superiority curled his lip. He raised his head with the air of a man who realizes that in this world the race is always to the swift or to the cunning, and advanced toward the iron gate which guarded the post-office, twiddling his cap between his fingers and assuming a stupid demeanor.

He raised himself by the bars, so that he could peer into the office, and as he did so an official turned at the noise, and adjusting his spectacles, inquired in a sharp voice what he wanted.

"Do you happen to have a letter waiting here for me," said the painter, in honeyed tones, "a letter from Messina, addressed to Master Adam, artist-painter of Nicotera?"

"Here it is," answered the postmaster, after a moment's search. He held the letter out as he spoke.

"Would you be so kind as to read it to me, good sir?" replied Adam, with marvelous meekness, and

foolish rusticity of manner; "one must be very learned to know what all that silly scrawl means."

"Willingly, my good friend," answered the postmaster, who by now had recognized in his visitor the Michael Angelo of Calabria. "It is from your son, Corporal Bombarda, no doubt."

"Oh Lord, yes; it is likely! The good lad handles a broom better than a pen, and my sight is failing me so that I miss every other word he writes."

"Still, the writing isn't bad for a gunner," said the complaisant official, condescendingly, as he adjusted his glasses, "and I can read it like print myself. H'm! listen—er—h'm——"

Master Adam indicated by a sign that he had not lost a word of the letter so far.

"'My dear Father——'"

"Ah, he's a respectful, obedient lad!" cried Master Adam.

The reader nodded assent, and continued:

"'My dear Father.—We have just experienced here such a great and terrible earthquake, that if God had deigned to prolong it for another five min-

utes, we should all be at this moment in Paradise, from which Heaven preserve us! I have been fighting like a lion against the brigands of Messina, who are not half as good as ours in Calabria, and cut two of them in pieces no later than yesterday. So I have obtained leave of absence for six weeks, and mean to come straight home. You may expect me almost as soon as you get this letter. Keep for me your blessing and some of those Palma figs which you know I am so fond of.

"'Your devoted son,

"'THE CORPORAL BOMBARDA.'"

"Thanks, kind sir," said Master Adam; "that is all that I want to know; I will come and fetch the letter when I have the money for it."

And forsaking the grating against which he had rested during this colloquy, the painter replaced his cap and quickly disappeared round the corner of the neighboring street.

CHAPTER III

FRA BRACALONE

Master Adam was far away before the poor official had recovered from his astonishment. As the old man had truly said, he knew all that he wanted to know, and so departed with a light and joyous step. The letter he had just heard had taken ten years off his shoulders.

Master Adam possessed one of those happy natures which are always prepared for enjoyment, and which open as naturally at the breath of hope as the flowers unfold their hearts to the sun. Seeing him tramp merrily along, whistling an old tune and thwacking the air with his stick, many a richer man might have envied him that content of soul which comes from an unconquerable faith in Heaven's goodness.

"Surely," he thought to himself, "I am a man blessed by Providence. I have a talent which no

one disputes, and which brings me fame, if not fortune. I have a son who is as brave as Judas Maccabeus, and a daughter as fair and as pure as the Virgin herself, and my two children are soon to be reunited! All that I love in the world I shall hold in my arms to-morrow—perhaps to-night! How Gelsomina will rejoice at the news I bring her! How she will spring into my arms to thank me for the trouble I have taken! With what an appetite shall we sup to-night!"

At these words, or rather at this thought, old Adam stopped short and struck his forehead like a man starting out of his sleep. He had just recollected that he had that morning given his wife the last of his money to buy herself some dinner, and that he was taking nothing home for supper. At the thought that his beloved Gelsomina would perhaps not even break her fast that night, the old man remembered that he, too, was hungry.

Master Adam heaved a deep sigh, and continued his journey with drooping head, sorrowing and humiliated. Only a moment before he had wished for wings; and now he felt that he would arrive home too soon, however slowly he went. He slackened his

pace, following the path mechanically, and racking his brain for some way out of the trouble that faced him.

By the roadside he passed two or three of his own paintings, some of souls in purgatory, some of Madonnas, but these only served to make him feel more acutely the instability of all human things. For these same frescoes, three years before, when he was in his glory, would have been surrounded with peasants, crowding together, kneeling and praying. He would only have needed to say to them haughtily, "I painted those," and to have gone the round of the group, to receive such alms as would not only have enabled him to return home with food for a week, but would have bought Gelsomina a new dress with the balance—a dress which would have been the envy of all the girls of Vina and Triolo. To-day what a change! Since the authorities had forbidden Master Adam's Madonnas to perform miracles, and the ungrateful Virgins had thought it best to obey, the productions of his brush had lost all their reputation, and were shunned, deserted. Not even the souls in purgatory escaped this humiliating experience, and Master Adam had the chagrin of see-

ing a peasant, with more pity for the painted than respect for the painter, doing all he could to extinguish the flames which devoured one of the damned in the artist's picture.

It was the last straw which broke the back of the old man's philosophy. He fell from discouragement to despair, and when he came to the brow of the hill, and saw the white cottages of Nicotera clustering on the brink of the sea as a flock of swans on the margin of a lake, and far beyond that the little house bowered in olives, where Gelsomina and his wife awaited his return—instead of trudging on, the old man fell, rather than seated himself, at the foot of a newly built wall which in other days would have furnished him with a canvas worthy of receiving one of his best "Last Judgments."

For nearly a quarter of an hour, his elbows resting on his knees, his head between his hands, old Adam sat there, absorbed in the saddest of reflections. Suddenly he heard himself called by name, and, looking up, he saw Father Bracalone and his ass on their way to a neighboring village to fetch provisions. So preoccupied had the old man been with his own wretched thoughts that he had not even

heard the tinkling of the bell with which the honest brute was wont to announce his master's approach.

The sacristan was standing before his neighbor, watching him with that feigned look of compassion which a cowled face can so easily assume.

"Well, Master Adam," he said, "what are you doing there? Dreaming of some great subject for a picture, eh, my fine fellow?"

"Alas, no!" groaned the poor artist, "I am hot, I am tired, and I am resting a moment, that is all."

"Nevertheless, that is a capital wall," continued the sacristan, pointing to the spot where the tired painter was resting, "and a Madonna would look fine up there."

The old man sighed.

"Yes, I understand," added Fra Bracalone; "times are changed, aren't they? And the Madonnas work no more miracles. Good heavens! if you had lived amongst them all your life as I have, you would know that that is just the sort of creatures they are. Times change; here to-day and gone to-morrow—we must be philosophical, my friend."

"It is all very fine for you," muttered the old man,

"you who have dined to-day, and expect to sup to-night."

"Dame!" answered Fra Bracalone, with his most paternal air, "*I* am no great painter; *I* don't seek for earthly glory; I trust in the divine Providence, and it would be tempting its wrath if I labored with my hands. I am only a poor sacristan, and this my ass is but a poor ass; but neither he nor I has ever wanted for anything, thanks to the benevolent St. Francis, our protector. We are bare and empty now; but if you are still here an hour hence you will see us return, I with a swelling wallet, he with his paniers packed. A pinch with me, Master Adam?"

The friar took his snuff-box from his pocket and offered it to his neighbor, who shook his head, at once to thank and to refuse.

"You are wrong, Master," replied the Franciscan, sniffing at the pinch of powder which he held between his fingers. "This snuff has marvelous qualities; it cures the megrims, dispels the vapors, and banishes all gloomy thoughts."

"You waste time in boasting of it to me," said the old man, curtly. "I have no alms to give you, and I take nothing without paying for it."

"Another humiliation to lay at the feet of my good master St. Francis," replied Fra Bracalone, raising his eyes piously to heaven. "Adieu, my brother; God give you patience, as he has given me humility."

With these words the friar made a clacking sound with his tongue, which set the ass moving, and he followed it out of sight.

Master Adam watched him disappear with mixed feelings of contempt and envy, for what the sacristan had said was true in every particular. He, with the prior, was all that remained of a community of Franciscans dispersed during the wars of 1809. The worthy pair themselves had been obliged to live in hiding during that stormy period, and it was only on the second return of Ferdinand to Naples, and after the fall of Joachim, that the brothers had reappeared and once more taken up their abode in the best part of the abbey, where they lived on a footing of the most Christian brotherhood. There were, indeed, some who said that, although Don Gaetano was the prior, it was really Fra Bracalone (in defiance of the rules of the Church) who ruled. But for all that, no outward act, no formality, lent sup-

port to this shocking assertion, and no one could say, although it would have astonished nobody to hear it, that he had ever seen Father Gaetano ring the bell or Brother Bracalone say the mass. And surely such scandalous rumors do not deserve either the credence or the attention of the grave historian.

One thing is certain in all this—instead of putting his hopes upon any earthly and perishable glory, as Master Adam did, Fra Bracalone chose a more solid and well-founded object of devotion, which even an earthly revolution could not turn out of heaven. The result was, that whilst the Madonna of Nicotera lost all credit with the people, St. Francis preserved his intact, and the worthy Fra Bracalone did not find any abatement of fervor amongst the faithful. On the contrary, the following of the Monk of Assisi was recruited from the Madonna's deserters. To this people, full of faith as they were, it was absolutely necessary to believe or to adore, and they were only contented and happy when they were believing or adoring.

Thus Fra Bracalone's visit was more like that of a teacher, levying fines, than of a monk begging alms. Every other day he started out with his ass,

he with a flaccid pouch, the animal with its paniers empty; and they made the tour of the surrounding villages, collecting their tithe in every market and of every kind of fare—fish, game, vegetables, fruits, bread and wine.

The *modus operandi* was simple. The brother approached a merchant, and uttered his appeal in the two holy words: "St. Francis." As soon as the man heard these words his hand went to his hat, like a soldier in the presence of his officer, and Fra Bracalone was left free to rake his choice of the merchandise. But whenever the goods were of changeable value, as, for instance, fish or fruit, the merchant took the precaution of mentioning the current price. Thus at the words "St. Francis" he replied, still standing with his hand to his cap, "At twelve sous" or "At fifteen sous" a pound. Then the sacristan acted accordingly, and showed himself discreet by taking only a little fish, or fruit that was bruised. In this way he kept as a right what greater exaction on his part would have changed into abuse. Besides, he always gave something in exchange for what he took: sometimes it was an image of St. Francis; sometimes one of those little cakes baked in the form

of a crown, and which they call *tarallini;* sometimes it was a little of that famous snuff which he had offered to Master Adam, a single pinch of which was warranted to cure all headaches, and secure a good night's sleep.

A perfect understanding, secured by confidence on one side and discretion on the other, reigned between Fra Bracalone and the peasants of the neighborhood. The only thing with which they sometimes reproached him was his lack of pity for his ass, which he not only loaded with overweighted paniers, but with the wallet which the friar ought to have carried on his own shoulders.

Fra Bracalone, then, had told nothing more than the truth when he promised Master Adam to return in an hour with a full pouch and heavy paniers.

The sacristan passed on, but his boast to Master Adam did not fall on barren ground. That blank wall which seemed to have been prepared for his use —that ass about to return laden with food, had awakened the old man's energies and the wolf in his stomach. Nevertheless, Master Adam sat on for a little while, thoughtful but not cast down. He was thinking out some grand conception, no doubt, for

his hand was tracing in the air an invisible outline, the reflection of one already formed in his head.

After a minute of this pantomime Master Adam looked up and turned toward the wall. His picture was designed; it only remained to execute it.

Taking off his water-gourd, he drew from his pocket his brushes and colors; then, after stepping back a moment to measure with his eye the proportions of his subject, he set to work so boldly and rapidly that his picture was sketched in outline in ten minutes, and so completely that there was no doubt whatever as to the subject which the fresco was going to represent.

It was once more a "soul in purgatory," but this time it was distinguished from ordinary souls by details both particular and personal. The damned was dressed in a Franciscan's gown, which showed that in the flesh the body which it then possessed had belonged to that order. Whilst the flames were devouring the unhappy man to the knees, he was forced to stoop under the weight of a pair of paniers topped by a wallet placed upon him by a devil, whose face was half-man, half-ass.

It was a picture designed in the spirit of Dante,

half grotesque, half horrible, and one the moral of which it was impossible to mistake, for it pictured the one sin of which the brother could be really accused—that of being without pity for the poor brute which he humbly called "his companion," but which in reality he treated more like a slave.

Master Adam had set to work like a man who has not a moment to lose, and he continued painting with a vigor and decision which showed that in less than two hours his task would be completely finished. As is usual with frescoes, he never passed his brush over the same spot twice, and finished with one turn of his wrist each tongue of flame, each detail of drapery or flesh, with a surety of touch worthy of Michael Angelo. The whole picture was progressing gloriously toward an end when Fra Bracalone, driving his ass before him, appeared at the bend of the road.

The sacristan had certainly kept his word. The ass's back seemed ready to give way beneath its load, and Fra Bracalone, with a beaming face, followed without seeming to care about the animal's distress, and even hastening the lagging ass's steps with a prickly switch. Master Adam noticed the pair the

moment that they turned the corner of the road, but pretending not to see them, he continued his work without turning his head, warned of their approach by the tinkling of the bell. The nearer they came the harder he worked.

At length the silvery noise ceased; there was a moment of silence; then a voice trembling with amazement and anger came from behind the artist's back.

"What are you doing there, Master Adam?"

"Aha! is that you, Fra Bracalone?" replied the old man, without turning his head. "Well, as you see, I have taken your advice; I did not like to pass such a beautiful wall without making use of my privilege, which is to paint all the souls in purgatory for ten leagues round about. If you will wait a minute, I have only the head of the condemned to do. That finished, we can go along together."

A face in the picture was still lacking; within a hood an oval space had been left by the artist. Into this Master Adam rapidly sketched, with a precision which was almost weird, the eyes, nose and chin of the lost soul. Fra Bracalone saw that he had no time to lose.

"Hi! Master Adam!" he cried once more, in a voice in which anger began to get the better of astonishment, "it is *my* portrait that you are painting."

"Do you think so?" said the artist, carelessly, putting in with the butt of his brush one of those subtle touches of expression which are the secrets of great painters.

"What! do I think so?" cried Fra Bracalone, seizing the other by the arm to stop him in time, if possible. "I more than think; I *know* it is."

"You are mistaken," said Master Adam, freeing his arm and trying to resume his work.

"No, I am not mistaken," replied Fra Bracalone, seizing once more upon that wicked arm. "I am so little mistaken that if my poor ass could speak, I am sure he would recognize his master."

The ass began to bray.

"There!" continued the sacristan, "you see I did not tell him to speak!"

"Very well; so much the better," replied Master Adam, with an effort which left him in possession of the captive member. "People have often denied the likeness in my pictures, and you most of all, Fra

Bracalone. This is how genius answers and revenges itself."

"But tell me," continued the sacristan, growing more and more uneasy, "what is your idea in doing this, Master Adam?"

"A very material one, I confess," answered the artist. "I can no longer make money by burning the dead, so now I mean to burn the living; that will bring me in something, I hope. As for yourself, do not grumble, Fra Bracalone; for instead of putting you into purgatory I could have put you into hell, and once there, as you well know, neither masses nor charity can get you out!"

"That is so," said the monk, who felt the force of this reasoning, and who in consequence began to find the situation not so alarming as he had thought. "Well, my good friend, let us see; can't this be arranged?"

"Oh, yes," replied the painter, "and I feel quite sure that a fortnight from now you will be in heaven. You are too well loved by the peasants of the neighborhood to have any fear that they will leave you in such a cruel position. You don't doubt that, I hope?"

With these words Master Adam, with a single touch of his brush, twisted the mouth of the condemned in a way which left no doubt as to the intensity of his sufferings. Fra Bracalone trembled from head to foot; he seemed to feel in reality all the tortures that he saw pictured before him.

"No, certainly I do not doubt it," said the poor sacristan, after a moment's silence; "but do you think that after having seen me in purgatory—and having drawn me out of it—they will have the same respect and veneration for me? Tell me truly."

"Upon my word," replied Master Adam, as he placed a tear on the contracted cheek of the "soul in pain," "no one on earth is sure of his safety, my brother, and the Pope himself, in opening the door of heaven to others, is forced, when he wants to get in himself, to give up the keys to his successor. In any case, I will shorten your period as much as possible, and to-morrow I will commence collecting."

"But without appealing to others," asked Fra Bracalone in a timid tone, "might we not arrange it between ourselves?"

"It seems to me that would be very difficult," re-

plied the old man, shaking his head. "One cannot get a soul out of purgatory save by masses and alms."

"As to masses, I will see to those," said the sacristan, who was pleased to see that things seemed to be clearing up somewhat. "I will ring them, and the prior will say them, as usual, without even asking for whom."

"There still remains the alms, in which I ought to have a part," continued Master Adam; "and one of the rules of your order, Fra Bracalone, forbids you to buy or sell anything for money. You see, then, how very difficult it is to arrange."

"How so?" said the sacristan, putting as much vivacity into the defence as his antagonist put into the attack. "We cannot trade for silver or gold, it is true, but we can give in exchange things which are otherwise precious."

"Ah, well, let us see what these things are?" said Master Adam, stopping in his work for the first time."

"You have a pretty daughter."

"My Gelsomina? She is an angel!"

"She is of marriageable age?"

"She will be sixteen *à la Sainte-Marie*."

"We will say her wedding masses free."

"That is something, but it is not enough."

"You have a soldier son?"

"He is only a corporal."

"No matter; it is not a question of rank, but of profession; in that profession he runs great risk of losing his soul, since he is much more often at the inn than the church."

"Alas! you speak truly, and that is one of my troubles."

"Ah, well, we will give him indulgences which will keep him in an unceasing state of grace."

"That is tempting; and then?"

"You are no longer young, Master Adam."

"I am nearly fifty-five."

"It is an age when one cannot count on very much more of life."

"Ah, yes; the days of a man are already counted by the Lord."

"That is true, and you might die at any moment."

"Well?"

"I will bury you in a consecrated frock; I will light six wax tapers round your bier, and I will

watch you myself, which I wouldn't do for everybody."

"That last offer decides me," said Master Adam, pretending that he could no longer resist the wonderful temptations which were held out to him; "but as, instead of going to buy provisions as my wife told me to do, I have amused myself by doing this painting on the wall, and as it is now too late to repair my fault, you shall give me in addition the half of the burden which your ass is carrying."

"Oh, with great pleasure!" cried the sacristan, gaily, delighted at getting out of purgatory so easily, "and you shall choose for yourself whatever is best and most appetizing."

"Is that understood?" said Master Adam, holding out his hand to Fra Bracalone.

"Take the whole lot," answered the father, in his enthusiasm.

"Very well," said Master Adam, sighing as he effaced the almost finished fresco: "Another work of art lost to the world, but my daughter will sup tonight."

CHAPTER IV.

MARCO BRANDI

"See, wife," said old Adam, as he entered his cottage, "I forgot to leave you any money to go marketing with; but there are provisions here—cook us a good supper, in honor of our son, who may be here at any moment."

"At any moment?" repeated old Babilana, "the dear boy!"

"You have a letter from him?" cried a young girl, who, rushing out from a little room at the back of the cottage, threw her arms fondly round the old man's neck.

"Yes, Nina, my child, I have had a letter."

"Well, where is it—show me it—let me read it!" cried the young girl, impatiently.

Master Adam made a show of feeling in all his pockets.

"There, now, you've lost it," said Gelsomina, vexed, and stamping with her pretty foot. "That's just like you."

"Don't scold me, Nina," said her father; "it's not my fault."

"But when did the letter arrive?"

"I—I can't say exactly; I can't recall the date."

"You can't remember the date! Oh, it only needed that! No, I don't want to kiss you."

"And is this how you thank me for having walked ten leagues to bring you news?"

"Forgive me, father," cried Gelsomina, embracing him once more; "I am a naughty girl! But I love you dearly—don't frown!"

The old man took his daughter's head between his hands, and tears of joy flowed down his cheeks as he looked at her.

"And I—I suppose I don't love *you* at all? You will never know what I have given up for you—but let that pass. I had painted to-day my finest picture—but we won't talk of it."

"Yes—and then?"

"Nothing. Go and help your mother. I feel hungry; I shall make a good supper. Go!"

This sense of appetite was not remarkable. The old man had not eaten since early morning.

The young girl ran to join her mother and assist

in the preparations, without even asking her father how and where he had got all the luxurious food that she saw before her, and which seemed, by its delicacy and costliness, to be more fitted for the table of a cardinal. Gelsomina was still young enough to believe that Mother Nature benevolently provides for the needs of all, and artless enough to be convinced that virtue exists and flourishes without support, like daisies in a meadow.

Master Adam quitted the house and sat on the terrace of his little garden overlooking the seashore.

The sun, which throughout the day had sailed proudly through a sea of heavenly blue, was now sinking in the west in a bank of copper-colored clouds. From these Stromboli stood out boldly, a bluish cone plumed with flames. Toward the south, like a ribbon stretching level with the sea, ran the shores of Sicily, and beyond, wreathed like his neighbor in a mass of cloud, rose giant Etna. Northward the view was bounded by the Calabrian coast, which curved elegantly outward to form Cape Vaticano.

The sea to the west, where the sun's disc had already dipped below the horizon, rolled with waves

of flame, in the midst of which flitted vessels hurrying to reach the port of Satina, or at least the Gulf of St. Euphemia, before nightfall. These belated and timorous ships, with their triangular white sails, might, by less experienced eyes than those of the people of that coast, have been taken for gulls flying home to their nests.

Everything betokened the coming of a storm, which awaited only the departure of the sun to take command of nature. The sun, in turn, seemed to leave the scene regretfully, and as if conscious that, like a sovereign dethroned, he was leaving his kingdom to chaos.

The spectacle was so grand, so fascinating, that although he had seen its like many times, Master Adam could not look upon it without emotion. He was plunged in absorbed contemplation when a light hand touching his shoulder roused him from his meditations. Turning, he saw his daughter by his side.

"It is very beautiful, is it not, my child?" he cried.

"What, that sunset, which promises us such a storm?"

"Ah, but look at those exquisite tints! What vivid colors—what a boldness of tone!"

"Look, father; those boats are hurrying to port. Ah, they will not all arrive in time; and the men in them have wives and daughters awaiting them!"

"You are right, child. Listen—the Ave Maria is ringing. Pray for those on sea!"

The young girl fell on her knees, and in a sweet voice which was neither speaking nor singing, she intoned the holy salutation. As she prayed the old man stood by, bare-headed and with folded hands, looking heavenward as if watching for some angel to descend and bear to the skies the holy words, as they fell from his daughter's lips and were borne upward by the first faint puffs of wind that were now rising.

The prayer ended, Gelsomina was about to rise, when her father's hand restrained her.

"You have forgotten something," said the old man, gently.

"What, father?"

"You have prayed for the sailors—pray now for travellers. In a storm the mountains are as dan-

gerous as the seas, and who knows whether your brother is coming to us by sea or by land?"

"You are right, father," answered the girl; "I had forgotten poor Bombarda."

And she prayed once more, and this time Master Adam did not content himself with following the words in spirit, but joined in the prayer with a loud voice.

"Now, father," added the young girl, when she had finished and crossed herself, "come indoors; supper is ready."

Master Adam followed his daughter, not without throwing a last glance at the magnificent panorama, already half hidden in the shadow of the black clouds, which, like a huge pall drawn by some invisible hand, completely covered the sky with darkness.

From time to time a flash of lightning, precursor of the storm, left a crack in the gloomy clouds, through which the eye caught a glimpse of the flaming force pent there. At the same moment the gusts of wind, which one heard overhead but as yet did not feel, shook the tops of the chestnuts, whilst the lower branches, to the smallest leaf, remained as if dead, so still were they.

The old man paused with his foot on the threshold of the cottage, and listened intently. From far away in the west a dull rumbling came faintly to the ear—a sound heavy, deep and ominous, but as yet so distant that one could hardly tell whether it came from earth or sky. The old man recognized the mighty voice of Nature, who warns her children of the danger she brings, that they may seek a shelter against destruction.

This solemn sight had made Master Adam forget for a time that he had eaten no food for twenty-four hours, but once indoors and seated before his supper, he again descended to earth in thought. Old Babilana had exerted herself to the utmost, and probably the table of the prior himself was not more richly furnished that night than was that of his painter-in-ordinary.

Master Adam, whose nature was a happy mixture of the spiritual and material, forgot what was impending out of doors, and confined his attention exclusively to what was going on within. There still remained behind his gastronomical satisfaction, a lingering regret for his effaced fresco, and a fear that Bombarda might not come after all; but with

the first glass of wine, and the first mouthful of meat, the work before him suddenly assumed such importance that he felt it necessary to devote his whole attention to it.

Nevertheless, the thunder drew nearer and nearer, and announced one of those storms of Southern Europe, of which only those who have heard one break above their heads, can form any idea. The wind had descended in its course, and now swept the earth as if it would uproot everything which stood on its surface. From time to time the poor hut, shaken by the squalls, trembled from its roof to its foundations, and at such moments Gelsomina set down her glass or her fork, seized her father by the hand, and looked at him with a childish terror, which he quelled by pressing his lips against her forehead. Meanwhile old Babilana ate on, with all the selfish, settled appetite of the aged, taking no more notice of the storm than as if it did not exist.

Suddenly through the crevices of the badly fitting shutters they saw a flash as of lightning; then an explosion followed, so terrifying, so sudden and so close, that this time Gelsomina, not content with

seeking her father's hand, threw herself on his breast, pale and trembling.

"It's only the thunder," said Master Adam, clasping the frightened girl lovingly in his arms.

"Only the thunder," echoed Babilana.

"No, it was *not* the thunder," said Gelsomina.

And at that moment, to corroborate her words, the thunder itself broke forth into one of those peals which seem to traverse the whole vast floor of heaven, and which surpassed the noise they had just heard, as greatly as the roar of the sea excels the murmur of the brook.

At the same instant a whirlwind seemed to envelop the cabin in its folds; the roof shivered, the shutters cracked. Master Adam himself began to show fear, and Gelsomina uttered a cry to which the tempest in its plaintive shrieks seemed to reply.

At this moment the door opened, and a man, pale, hatless, his clothes covered with blood, darted into the hut.

"I am Marco Brandi," he cried; "save me!"

At the sight of this apparition, and hearing this cry of distress and appeal to his humanity, Master Adam forgot the tempest and remembered only that

the fugitive who claimed his protection was closely pursued.

Instead of wasting time in words, he pointed silently to the little room which had been prepared for his son. The bandit flung himself into this hiding-place. With that instinct of self-preservation which is part of all hunted creatures, he had estimated in a moment, in the briefest of glances at his protector, whether he had the more to fear or to hope; and he had seen that he had everything to hope, and nothing to fear.

This incident had passed so swiftly that those to whom it had occurred might well have believed it the result of their own imagination, if the door had not remained open. By the blaze of another flash of lightning the three saw a troop of horsemen in the storm, galloping furiously along the road to Nicotera.

Gelsomina ran to the door and closed it. Rapid as the appearance and disappearance of the bandit had been, the young girl had had time to note that he was a good-looking young man from twenty-five to twenty-eight years of age, who even in flight retained the proud, fierce expression which in man or

in lion proclaims one who will yield only to numbers, and never to fear.

The poor, startled child had summoned all her strength to accomplish this act of precaution; but scarcely had she closed the door when her limbs failed her, and she would have fallen against the wall if her father, seeing that her strength had given way, had not rushed to her support. As he did so, a fresh occurrence called for his attention and energy of mind.

Another troop, which appeared to consist of infantry, was marching in the direction of the hut. Gelsomina and Master Adam listened anxiously to the sound of their steps, which came nearer and nearer. At last there was no longer any room for doubt — several men stopped before the door, and one of them rapped upon it with the butt of his carbine.

"Who knocks?" cried Adam.

"Open!" answered a voice.

"To whom?" asked the old man.

"To a poor devil who will be dead before we get him to Nicotera, if you do not take pity on him."

"What has happened to him?"

"He has just been murdered by Marco Brandi."

Gelsomina started, and her father looked at her. Both hesitated.

"Open, father; it is I!" cried the dying man.

"Bombarda!" cried father and daughter in one breath.

"My boy!" murmured the old woman, rising from her chair and resting her trembling hands upon the table to save herself from falling.

Master Adam opened the door. Several gendarmes bore in their arms the body of a young man, dressed in the uniform of the Neapolitan Artillery. In the middle of his breast was a large wound, from which the blood flowed in torrents.

The old man turned terribly pale; Gelsomina fell on her knees.

At this moment the horsemen who had ridden past returned, for a flash from the angry heavens had lighted up the road ahead of them, and had shown it deserted.

"Master," said the sergeant who commanded, "have you seen a young man from twenty-five to twenty-eight years of age, with long black hair and beard under his chin, and who is probably wounded?

If you have seen him, say so at once. He has killed your son!"

A smile of vengeance passed over the face of the unhappy father, and he opened his mouth to speak. At this moment Gelsomina uttered a cry, and the old man turned his eyes upon her.

She was on her knees, her hands clasped, and gazing at him with a look of strange, unspeakable agony.

"I have seen no one," said the old painter.

And taking his son in his arms, he carried him into the room opposite to that in which Marco Brandi was hiding.

CHAPTER V

"THE COMMANDER"

Six weeks after the events recorded above, one evening, an hour after Ave Maria, Corporal Bombarda and Marco Brandi left old Adam's cottage arm in arm, the one to rejoin his regiment, the other his troop. Bombarda was returning to ask for his discharge; Marco to announce his resignation. We will leave the brave corporal, of whom our readers already know something, to return tranquilly to Messina, and follow Marco on his road to Cosenza.

Marco Brandi was not at all the poetic type of bandit of whom Nodier has given us a portrait in Jean Sbogar, or whom we ourselves have described in "Pascal Bruno." Society had not been guilty of any personal act of injustice toward him, such as generally drives men from the cities to the mountains. He was simply born to the profession: his father had been a brigand chief before him, and the

son inherited the position in the ordinary course. This is how it came about.

Placido Brandi was the chief of one of those bands which were formed in Calabria in 1806 to oppose the occupation of the province by the French. For six or seven years he fought on behalf of the king; then, when the war was at an end, and the king seemed to have something better to do than to reward the chief, he decided to continue fighting on his own account. Brandi was a man of experience, and proof against all dangers; his followers were devoted to him and skilled in guerilla warfare, and they resolved to share the good and evil fortunes of their chief. Soon Brandi found himself at the head of one of the most redoubtable bands of brigands which had ever been known to lurk between Spartivento and the Gulf of Salerno.

The ingratitude which Ferdinand had shown toward his chieftain had embittered old Brandi's nature. He had seen men who had done nothing for the royal cause except follow the court to Sicily and who, in spite of the obvious duties which their military rank imposed upon them, had spent eight years parading with the English, returning in due course

to Naples to receive the rewards which others had earned, while those whose blood had stained the road by which Ferdinand remounted to the throne remained despised and even proscribed.

As a consequence, Brandi, who had sworn eternal hatred to the French uniform, now transferred his animosity to the Neapolitan soldiery, and after a decent interval the brigand changed enemies. It was a step in the right direction, for Placido much preferred to encounter Ferdinand's sbirri rather than Murat's agile infantry.

Placido's relations with the commonalty continued as friendly as before; it was only the military with whom he warred. From time to time, however, since uniforms, as a rule, carry about them less coin than any other style of dress, the chief was obliged to supplement his income by waylaying travellers, and as the English were now beginning to visit Sicily (which they had been unable to do during the French occupation) he compensated himself with a rich merchant or two, or a noble lord, for the expeditions inspired only by hatred and executed without profit.

Unhappily, there is no general so clever that he

does not, at least once in his career, make a mistake by which his enemy profits. During a certain badly contrived expedition, Placido Brandi, with only three or four men, was surrounded by a whole company of soldiers, and, although the chief defended himself like a lion, he soon found the struggle useless. That which was bound to happen, sooner or later, happened now; the three followers were slain and Placido himself was made prisoner. His conquerors received honors in proportion to the services they had rendered; that is to say, the lieutenant was made captain, the sergeants became sub-lieutenants, the corporals were promoted to be sergeants and all the soldiers were made corporals.

They conveyed the captive chief temporarily to Cosenza. We say temporarily, because, according to the Neapolitan penal code, the trial of the prisoner must take place at the spot where the crime was committed. Further, it was understood that the prisoner should be pardoned any little peccadilloes of which he had been guilty toward the French during their régime and should only be tried for those offenses dating from the return of Ferdinand to the throne. There was thus little to complain of.

Brandi declared that there was only one crime with which his conscience reproached him—a murder committed about four years previously—that is to say, some months after he had adopted his profession. The victim was a Neapolitan colonel, who had left Sicily, where he had been in command of a garrison, and who was traversing Calabria to report himself at headquarters. It was between Mileto and Monteleone that the tragedy had occurred, and the prisoner was in consequence transferred from Cosenza.

His trial, from its first to its last stages, lasted six months. Placido was condemned to death.

The morning after the judgment was announced, the brigand sent for the clerk of the court. He had only just remembered that a year after the murder to which he had confessed, he had weakly yielded to temptation so far as to commit a second. This time the victim was an Englishman, who was travelling from Salerno to Brindisi, and the deed had been committed between Tarento and Oria.

This confession nullified the sentence already passed on the prisoner, and he was consequently removed for trial from Monteleone to Tarento.

A second trial began, but this time, as the self-accused came before judges of a more business-like turn of mind, the whole affair only lasted four months. As on the previous occasion, Placido was condemned to death.

The night before the day of execution a monk visited the culprit to prepare his soul for death. The unctuous impressiveness of his exhortation so touched the murderer's heart that he confessed, with a remorse which was a most encouraging augury for the future safety of his soul, that a year after the second murder he had had the misfortune to commit a third, the victim being a rich Maltese merchant, whose ship was at the time anchored in Messina port. It was when three leagues from Reggio that, tempted of the devil, he had yielded to the inspiration.

Such an admission was too vitally serious to be kept secret, and the priest begged his charge to permit him to reveal it. Placido replied that he was willing to submit, in expiation of his sin, to all the ordeals which Heaven might think fit to require of him.

The monk, therefore, repaired to the governor of

Tarento and disclosed the circumstances connected with the murder of the Maltese merchant in such detail that there was no possibility of doubting their accuracy. The governor, as in duty bound, ordered the suspension of all preparations for the execution, and Brandi was shipped off to Brindisi under strong escort, and eight days later landed at Reggio.

Every one recollected, even now, the disappearance of the merchant whom Placido confessed he had killed. Nevertheless, as the population of Reggio consisted chiefly of merchants and sailors, many of the witnesses necessary to the case were absent on the sea, and the court was obliged to await their return. As these witnesses returned to port, their evidence was taken in depositions. All this delayed the collection of the evidence, and the hearing lasted altogether a year. Once more Placido was condemned to death.

The robber chief prepared to make a Christian end. From the day of condemnation to that of execution he fasted and prayed incessantly. Thus the priest who came to prepare him for his often-postponed end found him in a beautiful state of contrition. The good man passed the whole of the night

in chanting the litanies to the Virgin with his patient, and, although morning found him very weary, the zealous father would not yield his place by the condemned man, so eager was he to have the sole honor of this conversion.

Placido set forth, accompanied by the whole town, and stopped his ass from time to time to address a few edifying words to the populace. At each exhortation the crowd wept and beat their breasts. At last the procession reached the place of execution. There Brandi, stopping for the last time, began a speech so moving that nothing but cries and sobs could be heard around him.

Suddenly the criminal broke off in his discourse, struck by a recollection unexpected and tragic. Every one shouted to him to continue.

"Alas, my brothers!" cried Placido Brandi, "I am a miserable sinner who does not deserve your compassion! You think you know the full extent of my crimes, but I have this moment remembered that barely eight days before my arrest I cruelly put to death a poor Dalmatian peddler who had set out from Boggiano after Ave Maria, in the hope of finding a bed at Castrovillari. You see how un-

worthy I am of your kind sympathy. Leave me to that Heavenly wrath which I so richly deserve!"

With these words the condemned began to weep in so pitiful a manner that all those present asked Heaven to grant them in their turn as beautiful an end. Unhappily for the prisoner—who would have been assured of salvation if he had been hanged in such a saintly frame of mind—there was a magistrate in the crowd. Hearing the culprit's fresh confession, he ordered the guards to take no further steps in the execution, but to reconduct Placido Brandi to prison.

Brandi protested with all his strength; he absolutely yearned to die. They were compelled to employ force to get him back into his cell. Once there, they carefully removed from his reach anything with which he might possibly take his life, and in consequence his custodians had the satisfaction of handing him over, full of health and energy, to his fresh jailers when they came in dead of night to convey him to Castrovillari.

Once there, it was soon evident to all that Placido had spoken the truth, for, following up the clues

given by him, they found the body at the very spot which he had described. This fact, which proved the *bona fides* of the culprit, curtailed the processes of the prosecution, which lasted only three months and twelve days. Once again the brigand was condemned to death.

On this occasion, to the great surprise of everybody, Brandi did not exhibit the same resignation as he had done on preceding occasions. He showed impatience with his jailer and inattention toward his confessor. Lastly, when the time came to leave the prison for the scaffold and the executioner entered to clothe him in the penitent's dress in which he was to die, the brigand profited by the moment when the unsuspecting hangman unbound his hands to trip up that worthy by the heels and dart out of the door, which was half open. Unluckily, two gendarmes, posted outside in the corridor, crossed carbines and forced the prisoner to step back into the cell and allow the attendant to finish his toilet.

The moment arrived for starting, and it found Placido visibly uneasy. He mounted the ass, face to tail, and advanced thus backward, followed by the brotherhood of penitents, in the robe of whose order

he had been clothed. They carried the bier in which the condemned was to be buried and sang the litany for the dead. But neither the sound nor the sight, it must be confessed, proved very inspiriting to the doomed man. Nevertheless, every one expected that Placido would interrupt the journey with some of those beautiful discourses with which he had edified the multitude on the occasion when he had last made his appearance in this rôle. But the hopes of the waiting crowd were disappointed. Placido only opened his lips to complain that the ass went too quickly. He was not the same man at all—he had nothing left to confess.

At the foot of the gibbet the confessor gave up his charge to the hangman. The condemned kissed the crucifix for the last time and then mounted the ladder courageously. It was easy, however, to see that he was no longer upheld by that moral strength which enables a good man to die bravely, however many times he dies.

Once at the top of the ladder, Placido looked about him on all sides, possessed with a last faint hope of rescue. But when he saw the number of soldiers attending the ceremony, he understood that

his band, devoted as they were, could not struggle against such odds.

Then a sudden change came over him; a vertigo seized him and everything seemed to spin around before his eyes. The heavens grew black and the ground broke into flame. He felt himself hanging above a yawning gulf, where thousands of demons awaited his coming with shining, eager eyes!

He tried to cry out, but his voice died in his throat. There was a singing noise in his ears, as if his head were a clock striking the hours. With a last despairing effort he snapped the cords which bound his wrists, but his clutching hands found nothing to support him and struck only at empty air. He tried to think of God and call to Him for succor, but before his wits could frame a single thought he lost his sight and senses. The hangman had wisely profited by the second during which his prey was staring wildly about him to pass the cord around his neck.

Placido Brandi was hanged.

The penitents made a rush for the scaffold to take possession of the corpse, which belonged to them the moment the executioner stepped off the ladder. But, as it happened that not one of them had a knife,

some held up the body by the feet, while others unfastened the cord.

Immediately the lifeless brigand was released from the rope, they laid him out upon the bier, which they raised upon their shoulders. Then they took the road toward their home, followed by the hangman, his two assistants and the ass.

They had scarcely gone a hundred paces when those carrying the bier fancied they heard a dull growl, which seemed to come from the coffin itself; but as none of the bearers dared to assert such a thing to the others, all continued their journey.

Presently the rumbling sound was followed by a hoarse cough, slight, but terrifying enough to cause the six porters to stop instantly and stand as still as statues.

Then, simultaneously and as if by common consent, they let the coffin fall.

The corpse rolled out of it, writhing and grimacing like a man who has swallowed a fish-bone.

There was no longer any doubt. Placido Brandi had been taken down just in time.

So thought the executioner, who, drawing the dagger which Italian hangmen always carry, to dis-

patch their victims in an emergency like this, threw himself upon the reviving corpse, who had recovered his senses sufficiently to understand his danger, but as yet lacked the strength to escape it.

Help came to the poor wretch from an unexpected quarter. The penitents darted between the executioner and his victim, protesting that since Placido had been hanged, he had satisfied the demands of justice and belonged no longer to men but to God.

The executioner insisted, the penitents grew angry. The hangman appealed to his assistants for help. The penitents ranged themselves before the body of their adopted charge, who, sitting up and rubbing his eyes, was endeavoring to recall his scattered senses.

A struggle ensued, in which one side fought with all the fury of vengeance, the other with all the fanaticism of pity; one party shouting, the other singing; one calling the devil to their aid and the other invoking the protection of God.

In short, it would be impossible to say which side would have been victorious had it not happened that the dead, now fully himself again, realized that it would be extremely improper to let these holy men

expose their lives on his behalf, while he, who was, after all, the most interested person, stood by with his arms folded. Accordingly he snatched from a young chorister the cross which he carried, and carving for himself a passage through the ranks of the combatants, he struck such a terrible blow at the executioner's head with his sacred weapon that the man fell like a bullock, stunned by the butcher's hammer.

The two little armies uttered a loud cry. Contrary to all regulations, the dead had killed the killer!

The terrified assistants took to flight and the penitents bore Placido away in triumph, chanting the "Gloria in excelsis Deo" at the top of their voices.

This incident gave rise to a fifth trial, but this time the offense was one of contumacy. Placido had no desire to quit the protection of his kind friends, the penitents, and as their Church possessed all the privileges of a sanctuary, they provided temporary lodgings for him there, which the brigand found extremely comfortable compared with those to which he had been accustomed of late.

Placido Brandi was condemned to death for the fifth time, but the circumstances of his case were so

remarkable that the facts were laid before King Ferdinand for his decision. The monarch looked upon the affair from its comical side, and not wishing to risk the destruction of his temporal powers by employing them against one who was so palpably protected of Heaven, he granted Brandi a full pardon, on condition that he abandoned his profession and lived in Cosenza as honest a life as he could. These conditions appeared so reasonable to the old man that he accepted them without demur, and once assured that the pardon was formally granted, he embraced his good friends, the penitents, and departed joyously for Cosenza.

At the time of our story, then, he was living respectably at Cosenza, with no other sign or token of his unpleasant experience as a hanged man than the mark of the cord around his neck; and, as this ribbon of flesh looked very much like the order of St. Januarius (second grade), he was generally known simply as "The Commander."

CHAPTER VI

BANDIT BY DIVINE RIGHT

When Placido Brandi was arrested, Marco, his son, had very naturally taken his father's place. He was, as we have said, not so much chief by election as the natural inheritor—bandit by divine right. As a consequence, young Brandi, free in spirit like all mountaineers, brave like all Calabrians, made a very good bandit chief, indeed; but he practiced his profession like one brought up to it, as a calling and not as an art, with conscientiousness and fidelity, but without enthusiasm.

As soon, therefore, as Marco heard of his father's miraculous escape from death, he found means to visit old Placido in disguise, and then and there offered to resign his temporary chieftainship and give back the command of the band to his father. But the good man explained to his son the conditions on which he had obtained his pardon, and, although he proceeded to give Marco good counsel,

drawn from his experience as a leader, he acquainted his son with his determination to retire permanently from business. In consequence Marco had returned to the band, paid every man his share and forwarded to the ex-chief, his father, in a draft on the best banker in Cosenza, his share of the plunder gained by the troop under his management. He added to his father's money his own proportion, begging the old man to put it to better use than he could do himself, in order that he might have something to fall back upon if at any time he wished to leave the profession.

These details arranged, Marco had resumed the mountain expeditions for which the band was famous, to the great delight of his followers, who, not finding in him a leader of overwhelming superiority to themselves, feared him less, perhaps, but certainly loved him more.

One can imagine, then, their fright when, three years before, their chief, as we have told, narrowly escaped capture and only avoided it by scaling the abbey wall and by the humanity of Sister Martha, who brought food to his hiding-place.

The band, therefore, submitted without a murmur

to the conditions imposed by the Madonna, although it meant exile for three years from their centre of operations. They withdrew, however, outside the circle indicated by the Madonna, and while overrunning the whole of the rest of Calabria, religiously respected Nicotera and its environs.

When this period of absence expired, the band returned to the neighborhood. The occasion was a joyful one, for all the bandits had sweethearts, relations or friends there, as far as from Scylla to Monteleone and Pezzo. Besides, elsewhere they had felt themselves exiles; here they were at home.

It chanced that on the night of the storm these brave fellows were sitting at their ease in a house not far from the high road to Nicotera, celebrating their return to their native soil and drinking to the joyful reunion, when Marco Brandi, happening to go out of the house, encountered Corporal Bombarda, on his way to his home.

Marco Brandi had inherited from his father his hatred of uniforms, and, although, perhaps, if quite sober, he would have been content with bantering the young artilleryman, the few glasses of Calabrian muscatel which he had taken had got into his head,

and he resolved to prevent the soldier from continuing his journey.

He walked into the middle of the road, therefore, and began to pace it side by side with the corporal.

After a moment's silence, which was profitably employed by each of the men in taking stock of the other, Marco Brandi, measuring his companion with his eyes, asked curtly:

"You're a soldier?"

"Rather," answered Bombarda, twisting his mustache.

"What company?" continued the bandit.

"Foot artillery," replied the other in a tone which showed his belief in the superiority of his regiment over all others.

"Wretched regiment!" said Marco Brandi, thrusting out his lower lip in scorn.

There was a moment's silence, during which the corporal appeared to be thinking over what his companion had just said. Then he added, as if he had not quite understood:

"You said——?" he queried.

"I said 'wretched regiment'," the other repeated, calmly.

"And why, may I ask, my fine fellow?" Bombarda asked.

"Because it's a profession that makes more smoke than fire, more noise than work—that's why. And what is your grade?"

"Corporal is my rank," answered the soldier, with an air which showed that he expected the announcement to raise him to his proper place in his fellow traveller's esteem.

"Poor rank!" murmured Marco Brandi, this time thrusting out both lips to express his contempt.

"What! poor rank!" cried the young soldier, scarcely crediting that any man could dare to speak such sacrilegious words.

"Certainly," replied the bandit. "Don't you know the proverb, *'Besogna dieci otto caporali, per far' un' coglione——'*" (it takes eighteen corporals to make a——).

The words were scarcely out of the bandit's mouth before the artilleryman's sword was in his hands.

"You see, the proverb's a true one!" cried Marco, stepping back, "since you draw upon me when I have no weapon."

"You are right," said the soldier, sheathing his sword. "And now—have you a knife?"

"Does a Calabrian ever go without one?" retorted the other, drawing his stiletto from his breeches-pocket.

"Good!" answered the corporal, doing the same. "How many inches deep shall we fight?"

"The length of the blade," answered Marco, "so that there shall be no trickery."*

"Agreed!" cried the artilleryman, standing on guard.

"And now," added his adversary, "shall I tell you something to give you courage, if you need it? If you kill me, you will be made sergeant."

"Why?"

"Because I am Marco Brandi."

"On guard!" cried the soldier.

"Defend yourself!" answered the bandit.

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* To understand this allusion it should be explained that in Calabria and in Sicily the people always fight with knives. According to the gravity of the offence or the intensity of the hatred, they fight 'an inch,' 'two inches,' or three, and so on to the entire length of the blade. In the first case the fighter grips the blade between finger and thumb at the length agreed upon, so that the fingers serve as a guard, and keep the knife from entering his opponent's body any deeper than has been agreed upon.—AUTHOR'S NOTE.

The two young men threw themselves upon each other with all the tigerish rage of which the Italian nature is notoriously capable.

This duel to the death must have been the more terrible for being fought, as it was, in the middle of the high road, amid the flashing of lightning and the crash of thunder. But as there was no one to witness it, no one can tell exactly what passed. Only a troop of sbirri, marching from Reggio to Cosenza and turning the corner of the road, saw a man fall to the ground with a loud cry. At the same instant they espied another man, who, seeing the horsemen approaching, took to flight.

The sbirri, thinking a murder had been committed, fired.

Marco Brandi, struck in the side by a ball, gave up any idea of reaching his mountain haunts, and sought help in the first cottage that he could find. We have seen that chance led him to the house of his victim's father; that the bandit appealed to its master for succor, and that the old man, in his first heat of anger, would have betrayed the fugitive to his pursuers but for Gelsomina's silent, fervent appeal for the stranger's life.

Master Adam needed all the love that he felt for his daughter to enable him to stifle that paternal instinct, so deep and so wonderful, which called for vengeance on the murderer of his son. But after the first moments of his inward struggle he rose to a sublime height of magnanimity.

The wounds of the two men were both grave. For three days Marco and the corporal lay between life and death, and during that time the old man prayed equally for the "murderer" and his victim. Meanwhile, Gelsomina watched over the sick men, who were now lying in the same bedroom, like an angel of hope and pity. As for old Babilana, she understood nothing of what had passed beyond the fact that two wounded men were in the cottage. She tore up the lint and prepared the bandages without showing either emotion or curiosity. But, as one of the wounded was her son, from time to time, without pausing in her work, she wiped away a tear with the back of her hand.

Nicotera possessed no surgeon, only a barber—a chatterer, but luckily a credulous man — who was told that the two young men, his patients, were coming to Nicotera together when they were attacked by

Marco Brandi's band and left on the road for dead. The soldiers who had been hunting for the brigand chief continued their journey to Cosenza, feeling sure that he had rejoined his men, so that no one in the village suspected what had really happened.

For some days the wounded men were unable to understand how it was that they had again come into each other's company. The doctor-barber had recommended his patients not to talk, and as soon as Marco tried to speak Gelsomina placed her hand over his mouth. As he greatly enjoyed being silenced thus, the young man held his peace obediently. The corporal was kept quiet by his sister without any need for the employment of such extreme measures; it was enough for her to place her finger on her lips. And then the young girl would glide from the room, as full of grace and dignity as the Greeks of old who were her ancestors, and looking in her whole bearing and pose like an antique statue of Silence, recovered from some ruined palace of Herculaneum or Pompeii.

At last the convalescents were allowed to whisper —a species of dialogue much to Marco's taste—for in order to hear what he wished to say, the young

girl was obliged to lean over the bed. So feeble, indeed, was the bandit's voice that Gelsomina was forced to lay her cheek close to his lips. Yet, in spite of the weakness of his voice, Marco had always something to tell her which took a long time in the telling, and this contrasted markedly with the rapid exchange of words between brother and sister. It was remarkable also that, although Corporal Bombarda had been the more seriously wounded, by one of those strange, inexplicable caprices of Nature (or of human nature) it was he who first recovered the full power of his voice.

He profited by this to inquire of Marco Brandi, at a time when Gelsomina was absent, what had happened since he lost consciousness on the night of the duel. The bandit, who had no reason whatever for speaking to the corporal in whispers, found his own voice again, and answered as sonorously as possible.

In his turn the corporal informed the bandit that their host was his father and that his affairs had gone from bad to worse since the adventure of the speaking Madonna. Marco Brandi inwardly noted that the misfortunes of the family had been caused by him, and he resolved, like an honest fellow, to

make such reparation as he could by offering his hand to Gelsomina.

No sooner had the young girl returned than the artful Marco, pretending that the use of his full voice had fatigued him, began in a low tone a longer and more affecting conversation with her than he had ever yet ventured upon.

Gelsomina answered him only with her blushes. Then suddenly, at a moment when no one suspected that the conversation was at an end, the young girl rushed from the room and threw herself upon her father's neck, crying:

"Oh, say 'yes' at once, father; I shall die with grief if you don't consent!"

Master Adam listened to his daughter's little confession like a man who recognizes the full gravity of such a confidence. His intention had always been never to cross Gelsomina in her choice of a husband. As for money matters, his own position did not allow him to make any extravagant demands on behalf of his daughter. Nevertheless, he did speak a few words to Gelsomina respecting the social position of her would-be husband. Not that the profession of a bandit was not a lucrative and honorable

one, especially in the case of Marco Brandi, who had practiced it from boyhood; but it offered to a wife so many opportunities of widowhood.

Gelsomina reminded her father of several cases in which young girls of the neighborhood had made similar marriages which had turned out perfectly satisfactory, but the old man was inflexible; it was foresight and not prejudice which set him against a bandit son-in-law. Gelsomina quoted to him in vain the example of Placido Brandi, who now led such a patriarchal life at Cosenza. Her father replied that old Brandi was an exception, that his fate had depended upon the thickness of a rope, and that it was not desirable to base one's life's happiness on so risky a chance. There was something of truth in all this, and Gelsomina returned, with less anger than one might have expected, to acquaint her lover with her father's decision.

Marco thought long and seriously over the point so raised. He was not, as we know, an enthusiast in his calling. He had exercised it honorably and bravely, because those qualities were part of his nature, and he would have shown them in whatever other occupation he might have adopted. He re-

plied, therefore, that Gelsomina was not to trouble herself on that head; that he recognized the justice of her father's argument and that he was ready to sacrifice his calling for his love. From that moment, if the parental sanction dated only from his resignation, he resigned. They must, however, go to live in a district where he was not quite so well known.

For the rest, the fortune which his father had invested for him, together with his share of the goods still in the hands of his comrades, would be sufficient not only to pay for their removal elsewhere, however distant and expensive that might be. Further, it would assure them, if not a life of grandeur, at least an independent and peaceful existence in their new home, and would also afford Father Adam the opportunity of painting his Madonnas and insolvent victims of purgatory on all the white walls of the neighborhood.

This proposal was one which, in the present state of affairs, was calculated to give the utmost pleasure to the old painter, for it fitted in marvelously well with his own plans for the future, and he accepted it with all the frankness with which it was made. Marco Brandi exchanged vows of love with the

daughter and more worldly promises with the father; a kiss sealed the one and a hand grip clinched the other.

Meanwhile Corporal Bombarda, led by the arguments of his chamber-fellow, had begun to look upon military service from another and stricter point of view, and seeing nothing better than a life of slavery before him, had decided to share the fortunes of his family.

This is how it came about that, six weeks after their duel, the two young men left Master Adam's cottage arm in arm, one of them to resign his position as a bandit chief, the other to change his leave of absence into a permanent discharge.

CHAPTER VII

THE THREE SOUS OF COMPÈRE MATTEO

MASTER ADAM had decided to leave Nicotera and take up his abode elsewhere, chiefly because of his love for Gelsomina—a love which made it impossible for him to think of separating from his darling daughter—and also on account of the state of penury into which he had fallen.

There was something noble and yet sublimely simple about Master Adam's hospitality. The old man, when he gave shelter and sanctuary to the brigand, forgot not only his hope of vengeance, but his poverty too. It is true that the daily needs of the two invalids had increased his penury, but he generously took upon himself to incur all the consequences which his kindly action involved. Thus, under the double burden of providing for those who were sick and those who were well, poor Adam disposed, one by one, of the less necessary articles of furniture in his household. Then, by degrees, he came to those

articles which were in every-day use, and this forced him to betray his position to Gelsomina, who immediately placed at his disposal all her pretty gold ornaments.

The old man took them, weeping, and sold them, and so, for the first month, the sick men lacked neither good nursing nor good medicine. At the end of that time Master Adam, who had always paid ready money hitherto, received a week's credit; but the last eight days of the young men's convalescence had not passed quite so smoothly. Not only did the old painter's creditors commence to clamor for their money, but they refused to supply him any longer. However, those days had passed, and as neither the corporal nor the bandit had had the leisure to examine the house when he entered it, they naturally did not notice its denuded state when they left it.

Furthermore, as the old man did not wish his son to trudge the highways without a little money in his pocket, he made an appeal, on the score of their old friendship, to his comrade, Matteo, and asked for a loan. Matteo made a thousand difficulties at first, but in the end, overcome by his friend's pleadings, he ventured, miser as he was, to lend the other three

sous, exacting from Adam a positive promise that if the sum were not repaid within eight days he should give his friendly creditor something to hold as pledge. The painter agreed to this condition, and was thus enabled, when he pressed his son's hand in parting, to slip into his palm this final token of fatherly forethought, which Bombarda was careful not to refuse, insignificant though it was. True, he was far from suspecting that in taking the money he became three sous richer than his father.

It was only when the young men had gone that Master Adam fully realized to what a cruel state of poverty he was reduced. The house was stripped, and of the little furniture which it had once possessed there remained only the beds of the two wounded men. Gelsomina seated herself on one, and her father on the other, while old Babilana prepared their supper from the last scraps of food which remained. These were soon exhausted, and the family were left entirely without resources. Gelsomina wept. Master Adam, buried in thought, racked his brains to discover a means of raising the wind.

Suddenly a brilliant idea occurred to him, and he sprang up and embraced his daughter joyfully. He

had just bethought him that the young girl should go next morning to pass the weeks of Marco Brandi's absence with an aunt of hers, who lived at Tropea, and who had often vainly begged her niece to pay her a visit. By this means Gelsomina, at any rate, would escape those privations which her father could not have endured if she had remained, but which he and old Babilana could well contrive to endure, so long as they did not fall upon their beloved daughter.

At dawn Master Adam borrowed Balaam from Fra Bracalone, with whom he had remained on the very best of terms since the bargain which had been struck between them. The sacristan lent the beast without a murmur, and Gelsomina took leave of her mother and sprang upon the back of the faithful ass, which trotted forward gaily, rejoicing to bear for once so light and pleasant a burden.

Old Adam had decided to start in the morning, so that his daughter, on her arrival at her aunt's, should get the breakfast which she would have looked for in vain at home. Happily, Gelsomina's aunt received her warmly and also made much of her brother-in-law. She pressed him, indeed, to stay a day or two

with Gelsomina; but the old man did not forget that he had left old Babilana alone in the house without food and without money to buy any. He even refused to join the company at table, protesting that he had promised to return the ass by noon. But he asked to be allowed to take his share of the breakfast in his pocket, in order, so he said, that he might eat it on his way, but in reality that he might carry it home to his wife. Then he took leave of Gelsomina, promising to go and see her again as soon as he possibly could.

Further bad news awaited Master Adam on his return. The landlord of his cottage, who for some time had been pestering him for arrears of rent, had called and threatened to seize all his belongings.

When he heard this, Master Adam realized that he was at last at the end of his tether, and that he could struggle on no longer. He drew from his pocket the provisions which he had brought for his wife, assuring her loudly that he had eaten his share of them; and Babilana, leaving for a brief while the rosary, in the telling of which she spent the few leisure moments of her life, began to feast, while her husband paced the room backward and forward, full

of that agitation which precedes the taking of some desperate resolution. At last he stopped before his wife, with arms crossed and the air of a man who has fully made up his mind.

"Well?" asked the poor old woman, instinctively frightened by his attitude.

"Wife," replied Master Adam, "the time has come for courage!"

"For courage?" repeated Babilana, in a voice half passive, half interrogatory.

"To be sure. They seized our furniture to-day, to-morrow they will seize me."

"They will seize you!" murmured the old woman. "But oughtn't we to go away from this cursed country with our children and our son-in-law?"

"Yes, but they will not let us go."

"They will not let us go! What shall we do then?"

"There is only one thing left for me to do."

"What is that?"

"To die."

"To die!" cried the poor creature, dropping the morsel of bread which her trembling hand was carrying to her mouth.

"Oh, heavens, yes, to die—that is the only way for me to live at all comfortably!"

"Explain yourself!" cried Babilana.

"Listen!" said Master Adam. "I am going to lie down on that bed; you will run for the doctor, who will not come, because he knows that he has nothing to gain, whether he cures or kills me. To-morrow I shall be dead for lack of assistance—do you understand? Perhaps then they'll stone that wretch of a barber at last, and I shall be glad of it!"

"You don't mean to die for good, then?" murmured the old wife, who began to understand at last.

"Not likely," said Adam. "But once they think I'm dead, perhaps my creditors won't be so hard on me. For my part, I shall arrange the matter with Fra Bracalone, who has promised to look after me, and I shall slip away off to Rome, where you can all join me."

"To Rome?"

"Yes, to Rome, the home of art. There they will appreciate the talent which every one scorns here, and, besides, I wish to see, before I die, that famous 'Last Judgment' of Michael Angelo's, of which I have heard so much."

"Who is this Michael Angelo?" Babilana interrupted.

"It is another rogue, who also paints souls in purgatory. Well, we shall see if we can't find his match for him."

"I don't see that any good can come of all this," answered the old woman, shaking her head. "It's tempting Providence."

"How the devil can matters be any worse than they are? Desperate circumstances have one advantage—they cannot change except for the better. Go for the doctor, wife."

"But what if he comes?"

"If he comes, it will alter my plans a little, and I may, after all, die in real earnest. But be easy; he won't come. Off you go!"

"It must be done, if you say so," answered his wife, who for twenty-five years had been accustomed to obey her husband passively and unquestioningly. And she went to seek the doctor.

Master Adam, left to himself, took up the fragment of glass at which he always shaved himself and began to "make up" his face as an actor would who was playing the part of the ghost of Ninus in "Semi-

ramis." We have dwelt too strongly on the artistic ability of our worthy hero to let the reader think that it would fail him in such a vital emergency. Soon the old painter's face presented the appearance of a man seized with a mortal malady and in the last stages of the disease. Adam followed the progress of his work with all the vain complacency of an artist, and when at last he considered himself sufficiently be-wrinkled and bedaubed, he lit the last candle left in the house, arranged the light with a skill and effect worthy of Rembrandt and laid himself out on one of the beds.

Scarcely were the preparations completed when Babilana returned. As her shrewd spouse had expected, the doctor had refused to come. He had not denied the appeal point blank, but pretending that he had other more urgent cases to visit, had promised to call another time.

The good woman was about to announce the result of her errand to her husband when she espied him stretched out on the bed in the mournful, flickering light of that last solitary taper. The agony depicted on his face was so terrible that poor Babilana, forewarned as she was of her husband's scheme,

uttered a shriek of terror when her eyes fell on his pale, distorted face.

The corpse hastened to reassure her, but in spite of his consoling words, she was still trembling with fright when some one knocked at the door.

It was the landlord, accompanied by the bailiff's men. He had heard of the sudden illness of his tenant, and fearing some possible legal complication with the heirs, desired, if it was possible, to seize the furniture while the sick man still lived.

This was not, as we know, a long and arduous business. After having visited the outer room, which was already almost bare, the men entered the second, and without being moved in the slightest by the feeble pleading of the dying man, carried away the other bed, over against where he lay. Then, noting that by a refinement of sybaritism most improper on the part of a debtor, Master Adam had chosen the more comfortable bed to die upon, they gently raised the mattress on which he was lying, skilfully removed the two lower palliasses and rested the sick man on the bedstead.

During all this old Babilana wept and prayed unceasingly, but a landlord is, in all countries of the

world, a creature apart, exempt from the ordinary failings and responsibilities of humanity, and little to be moved by prayers or tears. Accordingly, all that the old woman said went for nothing. The bailiffs carried their work through to the end, leaving the rooms empty and the cupboards open. Truly the landlord had only an income of twelve thousand livres a year, which in Calabria is as good as fifty thousand, and Master Adam's arrears of rent amounted to fully ten ecus.*

"Well, my poor Adam," said Babilana, when the servants of the law had gone, "what have you gained by this comedy?"

"We have gained a good mattress for you, wife," answered the old man. "If I had been on my feet, they would have taken it, too. But hush! Some one else is knocking."

"It is *compère* Matteo," said the old woman, peering through the key-hole of the front door.

"Good! Let him come in," answered Master Adam in a whisper; "but to him I am dead—you understand."

Babilana gave a nod of intelligent acquiescence

* A livre=a franc. An ecu represents half-a-crown, English money.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

and went to open the door. Master Adam crossed his hands upon his breast, closed his eyes and let his lower jaw drop.

"So there he is, my old comrade," said Matteo, philosophically as he entered the death-chamber; "that's how it is with us, is it?"

"Oh, heavens, yes," answered old Babilana, "the Lord has taken him to another and a better world."

"And what has carried him off so suddenly?"

"He was taken this morning with weakness and trembling in his legs and a dizziness in his head."

"Ah! that's just how I feel when I've had a sup of drink," answered Matteo with sympathy.

"Alas, it was not for the same reason! The poor man had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours." (The good woman spoke the truth, though her intention was quite otherwise.) "Then our landlord came and took everything, as you see."

The neighbor intimated that he saw that quite well.

"That put the finishing stroke to it," continued the old woman. "Scarcely had they gone out before he gave his last sigh, so that they can truly boast that they have killed him—oh, oh!"

"There are some creditors who are without pity," said her neighbor. "You know, dame, your husband owes me three sous."

"Oh, heavens, yes! The poor, dear man; he told me before he died how much he regretted not being able to repay you."

"Did he tell you, too, that he had promised to give me something as security?"

"Yes, of course; but, as you see, there is nothing left."

"Look here, my friend, where he has gone to he will not need that cap. I always envied him it while he lived; it will serve me as a memento of my old comrade, now that he is dead. With that as payment, I will let you off those three sous."

"Impossible, my friend—it is impossible!" cried the old woman; "he begged that it should be buried with him. Oh, he was such a good man that I wouldn't for a kingdom fail to carry out any of his wishes."

"That's a comical idea!" cried Matteo, "to be buried in one's cap. Is he afraid of catching cold, I wonder?"

"Oh, Heaven, have mercy!" said Babilana, whose

absorbing sorrow prevented her from hearing the question.

"Very good, very good, old lady," murmured Matteo to himself, "I'll leave you, for I am so susceptible that I can't see you weep without weeping myself. But it is none the less true that your husband owes me three sous and that he ought to give me something as a pledge."

"What do you say?"

"That since you cannot pay me those three sous, I shan't make any bones about taking my security where I can find it. Adieu, Babilana."

"Adieu, Job's comforter," muttered the old woman.

"Ah, ah!" said Matteo to himself as he closed the cottage door behind him, "you stick to that cap, do you, my fine friend? So do I. We shall see which of us two will stick to it the longer!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE GRECIAN CAP

SCARCELY had Matteo reached his own home when there came a third knock at Master Adam's door.

Fra Bracalone, on his rounds "collecting," had heard of the untoward event in Master Adam's household, and hastened to visit his friend to offer him spiritual and temporal services. His spiritual offerings were no more than a few commonplaces which he had picked up at odd times from the death-bed exhortations of Father Gaetano; the temporal gifts took the form of a fowl, for soup, a flask of good Catanzaro wine, and some fish, noted for their light and delicate flesh.

As the reader will see, the sacristan was a worthy man, whose word was his bond. When he heard of Bombarda's dangerous state, he had hurried to offer him the indulgences he had promised Master Adam on his son's behalf. Unluckily, the corporal had by that time fully recovered his senses, and being a

strong-minded young man, he had rejected, for the sake of the things of this world to which he was profanely attached, the joys of the next, which Bracalone had promised him on behalf of Heaven. The worthy father, however, did not consider himself beaten; scarcely a day passed that he did not call at the cottage and engage the wounded man in controversy on the different mysteries of their religion, arguments in which the sceptic not infrequently got the best of it.

But one day, when the monk and the corporal were breakfasting together, and when the table, besides a generous assortment of foods to appease the hunger, contained three decanters of wine for quenching the thirst, the discussion turned, as usual, on theology, and it happened that the choice of topic fell upon the Holy Trinity.

The corporal, as was his wont, adopted an arrogant, overbearing tone, challenging his opponent to demonstrate the possibility of fusing three into one. On this an inspiration from above flashed into the mind of the man of God, and he asked the corporal if he would be converted, supposing such an "impossibility" could be proved.

The corporal, believing that he was pledging himself to nothing, accepted the terms.

Then Fra Bracalone took an empty carafe, emptied the three full decanters into it, and extending an arm toward his adversary:

"There is my reply," he said in a triumphant voice.

"How?" cried the corporal.

"*Tres in unum*—three in one!"

The argument was irrefutable, and from that day Corporal Bombarda bravely broke with his scepticism and thenceforth accepted with faith the other holy mysteries of his religion as if they had been demonstrated to him with mathematical exactness.

This humility had touched Fra Bracalone profoundly, and he became truly attached to his young convert, so that it was with great regret that he saw him depart for Messina. As a result of this affection for the son, he had forgotten his old grudge against the father, and this change of feeling our readers no doubt divined when Fra Bracalone so courteously lent his ass to Master Adam. Any lingering uncertainty will be dispelled when they recognize the kind impulse which led the sacristan to seek

the bedside of his old enemy with consolations and provisions.

The priest was sincerely affected when old Babilana, leading the way from the door to the inner room, announced the sad misfortune which had just happened to her and asked the priest if he did not wish to enter and pray by the side of the pallet. But the poor woman's news recalled to the conscientious sacristan another pledge which he had given—to see that Master Adam should have a funeral worthy of his talents. The father, therefore, refused the invitation, saying that he had not too much time for preparing the ceremonies of burial, and that, as he intended to watch by the dead in the church, he would there recite by the bier all the prayers which the most exacting corpse could desire. Saying this, he retired, leaving the provisions and promising to send immediately a decent bier and one which had never before been used.*

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* In Italy they do not bury bodies in a cemetery, as we do; but in an immense vault, situated in the middle of the church, and to which access is obtained by the raising of a slab. They lower the dead into this charnel-house and fling quicklime upon each corpse, to prevent any unhealthy results. This explains how it is possible for a bier to be used more than once.—AUTHOR'S NOTE.

Master Adam had not missed a word of this conversation, and he saw in the monk's promises and deeds both good and evil consequences for himself. On the one hand, Fra Bracalone had brought provisions, and the dead man began to feel the urgent need of them; on the other, the monk was preparing to fulfil his duty so thoroughly that the living man began to feel nervous. If the sacristan remained all night by the bier, Master Adam would have to decide whether he would be buried or run the risk of taking the monk into his confidence. One course was disagreeable, the other dangerous. The artist had counted upon solitude in the church, which would have enabled him to get away without being seen, and the next day his wife could easily have explained his disappearance by saying that the Madonna of Nicotera had appeared in a dream and conducted her artist to Heaven in clouds of glory. After this the absence of the body would need no further excuse, for the respectable painter, not being gifted with omnipresence, could not be at the same time in Heaven and on earth.

This beautiful scheme was now menaced by the friar's zeal, but our readers know enough of Master

Adam by this time to be quite sure of his unfaltering faith in Providence, for it is worthy remark that those for whom that goddess has done the least are always those who count on her most confidently. Therefore he concerned himself with the present only, leaving the future in the hands of God, and ordered his wife to prepare a supper suitable for a man who has not eaten food for thirty hours and who, when the meal is over, does not know in the least when he will eat again.

The good Babilana set to work, and with the assistance of a few charitable neighbors, got together sufficient cooking materials for her purpose, for neither stewpot, gridiron nor stove remained in the house. In proportion as there remained less and less of anything to fry, roast or boil the household had dispensed with such conveniences more or less easily.

Thanks to the good-natured of her gossips — a feeling which they might not have shown on a less serious occasion—the poor woman came off triumphant, and at the end of a couple of hours she had prepared a meal fit to wake the dead.

This, indeed, was the effect of the preparations on

Master Adam, who, on seeing the supper carried in, rose up with such a beaming face that any one watching through the key-hole might have thought that the worthy painter had received a foretaste of celestial happiness.

At this moment some one knocked at the door, and Babilana hastened to place her dishes on the floor and open to the summons. It was the bier which had arrived.

This incident, which might perhaps have had a depressing effect upon the nerves of a less philosophic corpse, did not take away Master Adam's appetite in the least. On the contrary, the good man made one of the heartiest meals that, to the best of his recollection, he had ever enjoyed.

He was munching his last mouthful of fish and draining his last glass of wine when shrill, discordant voices broke into song outside the door. The old woman began to tremble.

"They are the 'angels' who have come to fetch me," said Master Adam. "See, wife, there's still a little wine in the bottle; give them that. Let it not be said that they went away, taking nothing for their pains but their own gilt paper and cardboard wings.

Meanwhile I will enshroud myself in my best, as becomes a decent corpse. Go, wife, go!"

The old woman obeyed, closing the door behind her, so that her husband should not be disturbed in his preparations.

It was, as the "corpse" had said, the four choir boys of the village who had come, according to custom on such occasions, dressed as angels in long calico robes, pasteboard wings and aureoles of gilt paper, to escort the dead, who was to lie all night in the church. Behind them came the bearers and a party of villagers, headed by Matteo himself.

The good woman shared among the "angels" the little wine that remained, and as, by reason of the well-known poverty of the deceased, the celestial escort had expected nothing stronger than water, they were agreeably surprised by this unexpected windfall, paltry as it would have appeared in the case of a less unfortunate household. They intoned the "De Profundis," therefore, in voices full of real gratitude, while the bearers raised the bier on their stretcher and took the head of the procession, accompanied by the four angels and followed by Matteo, who led the mourners, and who, thanks to the Cala-

brian custom of keeping the face of the dead uncovered, never lost sight of that coveted cap, the possession of which, he was resolved, should indemnify him for the loss of those three sous.

The party reached the church by nightfall. It was situated outside the village, being separated from it by the whole length of the garden in which Marco Brandi had hidden. It stood on the slope of the mountain and was one of those picturesque little buildings which pose so obligingly for the landscape painter, the warm tints of its walls standing out effectively against the pale foliage of the chestnuts. The church, like all the rest of the abbey, was in a bad state of repair; but Fra Bracalone had made the old edifice look its best with fresh flowers and old hangings in honor of the solemn occasion.

Faithful to his pledge, the monk awaited the body of his old friend on the threshold. The bearers set down their burden on a kind of dais erected in the middle of the choir, and while the "angels" chanted their last psalm, the priest lit up around the bier the six promised candles.

The sacristan's scrupulous observance of his word frightened Master Adam more and more, for he had

never until this moment believed that the worthy father would fulfil his pledge to the extent of watching by the body all night.

The psalm finished, the "angels" left the church; the bearers followed and the villagers brought up the rear, with the exception of *compère* Matteo, who found an opportune moment in which to slip into a confessional. As a consequence Master Adam, in place of one custodian, was honored with two, a circumstance which, if he had known it, would assuredly have turned his misgivings into absolute terror.

Fra Bracalone closed the door behind the retiring procession, and, returning to seat himself by the dais, commenced to mumble his prayers.

Meanwhile Master Adam was considering what it was best to do. Ought he to wait, in the hope that the priest might fall asleep—an event which was sure to occur sooner or later—or should he confide in Fra Bracalone and let him know that he was praying for the living, not for the dead? This last alternative appeared to him the more risky; besides, he could have recourse to it at any time. So he resolved to possess his soul in patience and retain that perfect stillness which he had so often asked for—

and asked in vain—of his models. As for Matteo, he was subduing his own impatience, awaiting, as Master Adam was doing, the slumber of the sacristan, in order to put his own plan into execution.

Part of the night passed thus, and the two men, deceived in their hopes, began to find themselves extremely ill at ease, on the bier and in the confessional respectively, when Fra Bracalone broke off suddenly in the middle of a prayer, and, springing to his feet like a man who has forgotten something of the utmost importance, hurried rapidly across the church to a little door opening upon the corridor which led across the cloisters of the abbey. In truth, the good man had just remembered that he had neglected one of the promises which he had made to Master Adam — that he would clothe him, when dead, in a blessed robe. So he rushed with all haste to his cell, at the further side of the convent, to fetch the holy vestment prepared for this mournful emergency.

Master Adam and Matteo both believed that the hour of deliverance had come. Master Adam raised his head and Matteo half opened the door of his confessional. The first already saw himself free

and speeding across country, the other fancied himself at last in possession of that wonderful cap.

But at the moment when the two set foot—the one outside the bier, the other from out his hiding-place — a loud noise from the porch resounded through the church, and the door opened, giving passage to a troop of armed men, who scattered themselves about the church, shouting and laughing.

Each of the old men withdrew into his shell and continued to wait, still and motionless, the upshot of this unexpected interruption.

CHAPTER IX

SOULS IN PURGATORY

THE men who entered the church so unceremoniously and inconveniently were no other than the members of Marco Brandi's band.

Since the loss of their chief the troop had fallen into a deplorable state of anarchy and a lack of discipline fatal to all success. For several days after Marco's disappearance they had, it is true, maintained a certain amount of orderliness, fearing that he might return at any moment. But, little by little, the belief that he was either dead or a prisoner, became tacitly accepted. Once the powerful hand which had kept its grip on their weaknesses and passions was removed, the foolish robbers began to lead a life of disorder and idle caprice, giving way to all their barbaric instincts, heeding neither law nor gospel, reviling God and devil every hour of the day, singing chants in the taverns and holding debauch in the churches.

But on the eventful day of which we have been writing, several of these reprobates, having heard that the mail from Gioja to Mileto would pass that way about half-past six that evening, bearing the newly collected taxes of Palermo and Naples, hid themselves in ambush between the two villages, and putting the mail's escort to flight, laid forcible and irreverent hands on the coffers of the state. After this they withdrew to a friendly tavern, where they all supped like men with ten stomachs and no conscience whatever. Then, half drunk and full of quarrelsome feelings toward each other, they decided to go and share their booty in the church, where, it was hoped, the sanctity of the spot would forbid any man robbing his comrade. This was duly proposed and agreed upon, and it was with this laudable intention that the band intruded so inopportunely upon Master Adam and Matteo.

At first the bandits marvelled that the church should be lighted up thus, but reflection soon showed them that the illumination would greatly facilitate their work of sharing the spoil; and in their ignorance of the means which Providence employs to punish the wicked and convert sinners, they con-

gratulated themselves on this unexpected convenience. Some of the less impudent among them had tried to persuade the others that to behave in such a way in the presence of the dead was an act of impiety too terrible to be committed, but they had been shouted down by the band, and thenceforward, by one of those contradictions so common in vulgar natures, it was these very men who shouted and laughed the loudest to make their comrades forget their honest timidity.

Presently, thanks to a last remaining semblance of respect for the authority of the lieutenant, the hubbub subsided by degrees, and the company sat round and began to share the plunder. They started with the most valuable coins and finished with the small ones. When all was shared equally, there remained —three sous.

This was a sum exceedingly difficult to divide among fifteen men, above all, in a country where the decimal system was unknown. It was therefore resolved that the ownership of the three sous, instead of being a divided responsibility, should be left to chance.

Every man proposed a different way. Some of-

fered to toss for the coins, others to guess odds or evens, but neither method obtained general support. Those who had put forward the suggestions maintained them hotly; those who had rejected them persisted in their scornful refusal, and the dispute threatened to become a quarrel. Big words were already passing, as the forerunners of blows, when the lieutenant raised his voice above the din, announcing that he had thought of a plan which would satisfy everybody and which would afford them, at the same time, a source of recreation.

This double promise earned silence for the officer, who proceeded to make a most ingenious suggestion. He proposed to prop up the bier so that it should serve as a target, that each member of the troop should have one shot at it with a carbine, and that the one who should plant his ball plumb in the centre of the forehead should take the three sous.

The lieutenant was not mistaken; the proposal pleased the whole band and was received with general acclamation.

Every man assisted in the preparations necessary for this novel shooting match. One fixed the distance, another prepared the gun, a third measured

the powder, a fourth counted the balls. Then, when all the preliminaries were completed, every one crowded around the coffin, to prop it up according to arrangement.

But scarcely had the robbers laid their sacrilegious hands on the corpse than Master Adam, wisely judging that if he did not wish to be riddled with balls, he had no time to lose, rose to his feet in the bier and cried in stentorian tones:

"Soul from purgatory!"

At this cry and the sight of this ghostly uprising, the bandits rushed panic-stricken from the church. They even forgot in their terror not only the three sous in question, but their respective shares which they had not yet pocketed and which amounted in all to a sum of 7,530 francs.

Master Adam remained for some moments with gaping mouth and arms extended, no little astonished himself at the effect he had produced.

Then he leaped lightly from the bier, thinking that the moment had come for escaping into the fields. But, as he was too much a man of sense to abandon thus the goods that Heaven sent, and as he had often heard Fra Bracalone himself say that

when robber robs robber the devil can only laugh, he prepared to make the devil laugh heartily by robbing fifteen robbers at once.

He took the robe which had served as his shroud, spread it on the floor of the church, and in a minute had merged the different heaps of coin into one glittering pile.

He had just completed this pleasant task and was gloating with all the greed of life-long poverty over the gold, silver and copper displayed before him when he felt himself touched on the shoulder, and a voice breathed in his ear these terrible, unexpected words:

"Shares, comrade!"

Master Adam turned around swiftly and saw Matteo standing there before him, with his arms folded and a jeering smile on his face.

There were only two courses to adopt: To lose all or to share and insure the silence of his comrade by making him an accomplice. Master Adam did not hesitate a moment.

With that rapidity of decision of which our readers have already seen plenty of examples, he invited his *compère* to sit opposite to him and spread out his

handkerchief. The money, shared once more, gave each of them 3,765 francs.

There remained once again the three sous which had caused the robbers so much trouble and disputing. Master Adam pointed this out with a laugh.

"Exactly," said Matteo, stretching out his hand for the coins; "they are the three sous you owe me. Give me them."

"That's good!" cried Master Adam, putting the coins out of the other's reach, "I make you a present of 3,765 francs and you still clamor for those three sous!"

"I ask for them because you owe me them," replied the other, "and I will pester you until you pay me them. Come, you are rich enough to pay your debts now; give me my three sous."

"*Your* three sous! I think you had better say *my* three sous."

"Will you give me my three sous?" cried Matteo, seizing Master Adam by the hair.

"Will you let my three sous alone?" cried Master Adam, clutching Matteo by the neck.

The pair had now gone too far to draw back; besides, they were headstrong, like all Calabrians, and

so each continued to tussle with the other, shouting at the top of his voice:

"My three sous! my three sous!"

Let us leave these venerable squabblers for the moment, to choke each other at their leisure and shout at their own sweet will, and return to the bandits.

The troop had fled as if all the fiends of hell were at their heels. But headlong as their flight was, it was obviously necessary to stop when they lacked breath for any further effort. Some of them leaned against the trees, others seated themselves on slabs of rock; some threw themselves on their stomachs, others fell flat on their backs.

As their breathing grew more regular and less painful, it began to dawn upon one of them that they might, after all, have been deceived and have been the dupes of some optical or mental delusion. He hinted this opinion timidly, but their fright was too recent for the troop to come round to his view so suddenly.

However, when another ten minutes had passed, the calmness of the night and the cool, refreshing air calmed the brows and spirits of the fugitives. Nature

all around them appeared so serene, so fixed and peaceful that they could not believe that scarcely a quarter of a league away the whole order of the material universe was being reversed in one of its primal laws. Their thoughts did not take this form precisely, but in whatever fashion the idea came to them, it made fully as strong an impression.

Thus, after a further space of silence, they became almost convinced that they were too hasty in leaving the church, especially as they had left their money and weapons there. One of the troop proposed to return and fetch them, and although, after the fate of the previous suggestion made a few minutes before, one would have thought that the band would reject the proposal with terror, they actually welcomed it. Every man had now plucked up courage and overcome his terror. But during this process each one restrained his sense of shame, and the troop therefore rose to their feet silently and started for the church again without uttering a word.

In spite of the bold resolution which every man had taken to himself, in proportion as they drew near to the church once more the bandits began to feel inward shiverings, certain symptoms of return-

ing fear. From time to time the foremost brigand stopped to listen, and all the others stopped and listened with him. Then followed a silence, during which each man could hear the beating of his own heart. Finally they all started forward again at a pace which slackened more and more the nearer they approached the spot whither every one was tending, but where nobody wished to arrive.

At length they reached the top of a hillock, from which they could see the church—a black mass, with glowing windows. This showed them that the mortuary dais was still lighted up.

The bandits turned to one another, mutely and mutually asking whether they should go any further. At last the lieutenant, seeing the general hesitation, made up his mind, and announced that he would go alone. Being, as he was, in a state of grace, in consequence of having that morning received absolution from a monk (whom he had robbed), he could, he declared, venture forward with less risk to his soul than the others could do.

The band promised to wait for him. The lieutenant crossed himself and set off.

His comrades followed his movements with their

eyes—for the night was so truly Oriental in its limpid brightness as to be clearer than our Western twilights—and saw him advance at a steady pace toward the church, passing from their view into dim and dimmer shadow. Then he was lost to sight in the darkness, and all the troop remained silent and motionless, their eyes fixed on the spot where he had passed out of sight and where he ought in due course to reappear.

Two minutes passed thus, in the solemn, tranquil stillness of the night, which inspired those poor, superstitious souls with more fear than a volley of musketry would have done.

Then they saw, breaking through the night like dawn from the darkness, a man's figure, running rapidly toward them. Their first instinct, it must be confessed, on seeing the lieutenant's headlong pace, was to run without waiting for him; but, quickly observing that no one was pursuing him, they felt ashamed of their terror.

The lieutenant, for his part, had no sooner spied them than he doubled his pace, and in a few minutes arrived in their midst, pale and panting and his hair bristling with fright.

"Well!" cried one of the bandits, "is that damned soul there still?"

"I should rather think so!" replied the lieutenant, gasping for breath after every word. "Yes, yes, it's there, and others with it!"

"Have you seen them?"

"No, but I listened at the door."

"Then how do you know there are so many?"

"How do I know? I know because I heard them, each of them demanding his three sous; and you can guess how many there must be, when out of 7,530 francs there's only three sous apiece!"

The impression produced by such a story on men in their state of mind may be guessed. Each one made openly the sign of the cross and inwardly vowed to live in future the life of an honest man, so convincingly had the lieutenant told his experiences.

The fact is that he had reached the door of the church at the moment when Master Adam and Matteo were at the height of their quarrel. They were pummelling each other and shouting in such absorbing frenzy that they never saw that they were surrounded by a dozen gendarmes, whose presence even

they did not notice until the corporal in command cried to them, in a voice of thunder:

"Lay down your arms, wretches! You are my prisoners!"

CHAPTER X

THE EARTHQUAKE

When Marco Brandi arrived at the capital of Calabria he found half of its houses in ruins and the other half empty. The people were camping out in the fields. There had been an earthquake during the night.

He himself had passed that fateful night at a lonely inn, some three leagues from Cosenza, and during his first sleep had felt his bed move, but had believed himself to be dreaming. In the morning he had found his bed standing in the middle of the room, and as, at the same time, he spied daylight through the cracks in the solid walls, he began to understand what had happened. The landlord, who was a lighter sleeper, had fled from the house at the first shock and left Brandi in sole possession.

Marco, who would not have felt the least scruple in robbing a traveller on the highway, would have considered it most dishonorable to leave the house

without paying his reckoning. He accordingly calculated the cost of his supper and bed, and adding to the bill some small silver for the waiting-maid, he left the money in the most conspicuous spot in the room and went out. He was uneasy at the probable effect of the earthquake on Cosenza, although the shocks themselves had affected him so lightly three leagues away.

The nearer he drew to the town the more his fears seemed justified. Every house that he passed on his way showed more or less alarming results of the upheaval. But it was when he reached the summit of the mountains which overlook Cosenza from Martorano that he obtained a bird's-eye view of the catastrophe.

The earthquake had visited the town from end to end with every variety of misfortune and caprice. Here a house had been left standing, whole and sound, in the middle of a street laid in ruins; there a house, facing the north, had been turned round and made to face the south; another had disappeared entirely, swallowed up in the gulf which had closed over it; a fourth remained denuded, leaning only on its frail supports and trembling like a drunken man.

And from the ruins arose the wailing of human voices and the bellowing of animals in pain, with a pitiful iteration enough to freeze the blood in the heart of the stoutest.

Young Brandi drew near to this scene of desolation, his mind troubled by the thought that his father might be there among those victims of Nature. He tried everywhere to learn something of Placido's whereabouts, but the old bandit lived on the opposite side of the town, and his son was obliged to traverse Cosenza from end to end before he could hope to obtain any news of the old man.

On reaching the little stream which ran through the town, the young bandit found that the earthquake had diverted its course and that its bed was now left dry. Workmen were busy there already, digging furiously at the mud. They were doing so under the direction of the local antiquaries who, it seemed, had read in Jornandes that the body of Alaric the Goth, enclosed in three caskets of gold, silver and bronze respectively, had been buried in the bed of this rivulet by his soldiers, who had for this purpose divided the course of the Busento for a few hours and had then permitted it to return to its

banks. This time it was not the hand of man which had undertaken this gigantic task, but God, who had breathed upon the waters so that they were not.

Marco drew near to the diggers and asked them why they were digging there while wretched, half-buried, half-dead people were clamoring for the help of their spades. They answered that they were searching for the body of Alaric, who had been buried there fourteen hundred years before. Brandi resumed his journey, believing that the shock of the night before had sent the Cosenzans mad.

About a hundred paces further on the traveller came upon a group consisting of an old man, three or four monks and a dozen sisters of charity, who were at work on the ruins of a house, from which came most pitiable cries for help. On drawing nearer, Marco recognized his father in the old man who was directing operations. The two Brandis threw themselves delightedly into each other's arms, and then, taking up a pick-axe apiece, set to work with joyous energy. They had the good fortune to save the lives of a mother and her two children.

Meanwhile the workers in the bed of the Busento were at the height of their happiness. They had

just come upon a little bronze horse, worth quite half a crown.

Marco and his father hastened to another house, where their help was urgently needed, while the savants continued their search. All day the two parties labored, the one to save the living and the other to discover and despoil the dead. At night, overcome with fatigue, Placido and his son returned to the old man's home, which remained standing in the midst of the ruins of its street. The antiquaries camped in the bed of the river.

The two Brandis must have possessed a nerve which indicated both courage and disdain to sleep calmly in a house which might crash in upon them at any moment, and they were almost the only people in the town who dared to trust to the shelter of a roof that night.

The inhabitants generally took refuge in the fields and hastily built a sort of bivouac with beams and straw. This improvised camp might well have been mistaken for a Hottentot kraal if the aristocracy of the refugees (for class distinction exists everywhere, even at earthquake times) had not varied the monotony of these huts with rows of carriages, the horses

standing harnessed in the shafts, the masters within and the coachmen on the box. The owners, no doubt, found this movable residence more comfortable, more convenient and, above all, less vulgar than the barracks about them. Nothing could be much more miserable than the inhabitants of this wretched, improvised town, in which all the people had something or somebody to mourn for, and where those who had lost only all their possessions were probably the least unfortunate.

It was a terrible night, for at whatever hour of the twenty-four an earthquake occurs in Italy it is sure to remanifest itself the following night. It seems as if the earth feared to rid itself of its after-convulsions, so long as the sun's eye was upon it, and that it awaited the slumbering of its king to fall again into the fever which set it groaning and writhing with the heat from its burning bowels.

Every other minute through the hours of darkness the surface of the soil was seized with shivering fits. Clocks struck the hours at all times of the night, and cries of "Earthquake! earthquake!"—plaintive, terrifying cries—resounded through the stillness. There was a melancholy harmony in the

noises of the night, in the prayers and groans which seemed, as they mounted dolorously to Heaven, like the last sigh of one of the accursed cities of Scripture.

Old Placido and his son slept for nearly two hours. Then, although Heaven appeared to have veritably taken their house under its protection, they left it, not to seek refuge or to lament, but to try to rescue the wretched creatures who, though buried in the *débris* of their own houses, still lived and called for succor.

Father and son stopped, however, on the threshold of the house to watch a strange procession which was approaching them. It was composed of some thirty Capuchins, of whom a few carried torches, while others, stripped to the waist, flogged themselves with cords studded with nails. They were promenading the streets of the town, doing public penance for their sins and the sins of the people.

As they passed, men and women, looking spectral in the weird light, glided from the dark corners of the ruined houses and fell on their knees before the procession, mingling their prayers with those of the flagellants, who, as they chanted, kept time with the

scourges on their own backs, whence the blood poured in jagged channels.

The old man and his son knelt like the rest and commenced to recite the holy litanies, but as the monks passed before his eyes the younger suddenly ceased his prayers and seized his father by the arm.

He had just recognized in the chief of the penitents his lieutenant, Paolo, and in the others the rest of his band, whom he believed to be hidden away in the mountains and engaged in a very different occupation from that of self-punishment.

Marco could still scarcely believe his eyes, and being too religious to disturb his old friends in their pious work, he contented himself with accompanying the crowd, who followed the holy men, singing their praises. They did not doubt that such a propitiatory deed would disarm God's wrath.

Arrived at the steps of the church, the torch bearers and flagellants redoubled their efforts of voice and arm. This holy example excited emulation in the crowd. Every one knelt, the men tore their hair, the women beat their bosoms, and the mothers, to make the expiation complete, beat their children.

At length, when the chants were finished, the

torch bearers led the way into the church; the flagellants followed, one by one. But Paolo, like a general commanding a retreat, remained to the last. He was about to enter, too, when Marco Brandi seized him by the arm.

The lieutenant, whose conscience, in spite of the affecting penance which he had just undergone, had probably plenty of sins yet upon it, tried to free himself without looking round, judging it prudent not to show his face to one who was evidently so desirous of seeing it. But the next moment he heard his name spoken by a voice which he knew well.

"Captain!" he cried, turning round.

"Myself," answered Marco. "What the devil are you doing here?"

"You see, captain, the grace of Heaven has touched us, and we are doing penance for our past."

"That is lucky, indeed," answered Marco, "for I was on my way to resign the chieftainship of the band, and I was terribly afraid I should have to deal with a set of hardened sinners."

"I congratulate you, captain, on your return to a holy life," answered the lieutenant with profound humility. "But won't you tell us how it is that we

find you here, when we thought you a prisoner or dead?"

"Very good. And you, in turn, shall tell me how it is that I find you decked out in monkish robes, when I left you wrapped in bandits' cloaks?"

"Yes, captain. But come into the church; we can talk better there. I always go in fear that somewhere in the crowd there may be a gendarme who will think it a laudable act, in the sight of Heaven, to seize me by the collar, and just now when I felt myself arrested by you, I was not in the least resigned. I am repentant enough to be penitent, but not ripe for martyrdom yet, by a long way."

Marco followed Paolo into the church, laughing to himself at the fright which he had given his old lieutenant.

In the sacristy Marco Brandi found the rest of the band, who greeted him with unfeigned joy, for, as we have said, their chief was greatly loved by his men. But, in spite of themselves, a touch of fear marred their pleasure; the poor wretches began to be afraid that Marco had sought them out to lead them back to the paths of sin.

Paolo hastened to reassure them, informing them

that their old chief, if not repentant like themselves, was at least converted to honesty, and that, far from wishing to recall them, he had intended to resign his leadership and relieve them of their oath. From the moment that this was understood nothing marred the pleasure of the reunion.

Marco acquainted his old followers with the motives which had caused him to wish to retire into private life. They congratulated him with all their hearts and in turn described the apparition of the dead man in the church where they were sharing their plunder, and told how, already affected by that incident, they had retired into the mountains with the intention of giving up brigandage, when the earthquake of the night before, evidently caused by the act of sacrilege which they had committed, had confirmed them in their pious intention.

They had then, they told him, set out for Cosenza, where there was a convent of Capuchins renowned for twenty leagues about for their piety, and had allowed themselves to be brought before the prior, to whom they had confessed their sins, submitting beforehand to whatever penalty he might impose. The prior (who did not neglect to forward the wel-

fare of his order when it did not conflict with the service of Heaven) resolved to make capital out of this wholesale and unexpected repentance. He had accordingly organized that midnight procession, it being understood that the harder the flagellants scourged themselves the greater the honor to the order. We have seen how conscientiously the bandits carried out this instruction, so that the pious inspiration of the prior was rewarded. Besides, in case no further quakings were felt, every one was at liberty to think, if he chose, that the cessation of the disastrous convulsions was attributable to the benevolent intervention of the reverend Capuchin fathers.

From the moment that he had recognized Paolo and ascertained that all his old troop were present, Marco had determined to make use of the men, whom he knew to be courageous at bottom and whose devotion he had more than once proved for his own purposes. He therefore addressed them at once, as a brave man speaking to his kind, and while praising them for the step they had taken, pointed out that their submission would probably be still more acceptable to God if, after employing spiritual means

to guard against the evils of the future, they should by temporal means atone, as far as they were able, for the misdeeds of the past. There were, he pointed out, fifteen of them, vigorous, brave, shrewd men; every one of whom was needed to give help in the different quarters of the town where it was most needed. Three or four sufferers snatched from death, added the ex-chief, and whose prayers would intercede with Heaven for their rescuers, were allies whom the bandits could not afford to despise, considering that Heaven might justly look upon their repentance as a tolerably late one.

Such a proposal could only have been accepted, but it was received with real enthusiasm, and under the guidance of their late chief, the brigands scattered themselves in all parts of the town, risking their lives with wonderful audacity and infusing courage into the most cowardly by their example. Their efforts had already been rewarded, and five or six wretches had been dug out of the ruins, when loud cries were heard coming from the bed of the Busento.

Every one ran to the spot, but prompt as was their action, they arrived too late.

Heaven, which had made the stream run dry the day before, had just ordered it back to its channel; and the waters had rushed in suddenly, bounding forward like horses in a race, and had swept away seaward the respectable gentlemen who, in their enthusiasm for archæology, had not left even for a moment the spot where they hoped to disinter the coffin of Alaric.

This accident was the last which befel the inhabitants of Cosenza on this occasion. The shocks which succeeded became less severe and less frequent by degrees, and with the light of morning, which removed the uncertainty and terror from their hearts, new courage came to the unhappy people, who, happily, were ignorant of the profession and identity of those who had rendered them such valuable and unexpected service during the night.

The bandits, at dawn, prudently betook themselves to the convent of the Capuchins, and Marco Brandi shut himself up with his worthy parent, to receive his benediction and to regulate all such little money matters as his marriage arrangements necessitated.

CHAPTER XI

DEVOTION

We have said that the elder Brandi was a man of method. All his accounts were in the strictest order, and his son had nothing but praise for the honorable and judicious way in which his own share of the capital had been invested. But, as the young would-be bridegroom was, under the circumstances, in need of ready money, he took a thousand ecus in gold and a bond for fifteen or sixteen thousand francs, payable to bearer on the houses of Mariekoff, of Naples, and Tortonia, of Rome, and left the rest, which amounted to about as much again, in the hands of the trustworthy financier who had already almost doubled his son's capital for him.

Marco had his reasons for not returning to Nicotera by the way he had come, although in the excitement of the panic which reigned at Cosenza he had not, he hoped, been recognized. This was quite

probable, as every one had been too preoccupied with his own fears and hopes to give his mind to anything but the catastrophe which had overwhelmed half the town and might next day visit the other half. Marco, therefore, set out to return by San Lucido, and thence, having bargained with some fishers for his passage, he journeyed along the coast to St. Tropea.

On reaching that town, the ex-brigand learned two pieces of news which he was far from expecting; first, that Master Adam had just died, and next, that Gelsomina had been staying in that town for the past fortnight with her aunt. He soon inquired his way to the house, where he found his sweetheart surrounded by a cluster of girls of her own age, who had come to console her with the customary platitudes, which in this case doubled the poor girl's sorrow instead of solacing it. Gelsomina's grief was, indeed, deep, for though capricious and impatient by nature, she was good-hearted and loved her poor father truly.

When she saw the open door give admittance to her sweetheart, the young girl, feeling that God had sent her this loving heart on which to pour out the

sorrows of her own, threw herself upon Marco's neck, sobbing unrestrainedly. The news had been spread about that the girl was betrothed to a friend of her brother, and as the company instinctively recognized that lover in the newcomer, they withdrew discreetly and left the couple alone.

Marco Brandi made no effort to console Gelsomina. On the contrary, he spoke to her of Master Adam's excellent qualities, of his love for her and of every trait and recollection which might touch her heart, so that the young girl felt, as she wept, that her lover had poured upon her suffering spirit the true, the only balm which could heal her sorrow. Then, little by little, words of tenderness and love glided gently into his soothing speech, as the sun's rays pierce the storm clouds. Marco ceased to lament the present and began to voice his hopes for the future.

He spoke of the plans for their future happiness which Master Adam and they had made together, and which they would now be obliged to carry out without him; and all this he did with such loving tact that he finished by soothing Gelsomina's heart by virtue of a delicate instinct of conduct which one

would never have expected to find in a half-civilized mountaineer. The dark shadow which seemed to have fallen across Gelsomina's life lifted by degrees; she who had begun by weeping, ended by talking, and she found, through resignation, a way to hope.

Toward the end of the day, however, a strange rumor began to circulate through the town. It was said that Fra Bracalone, passing through the neighboring village on his usual begging expedition, had dropped mysterious hints respecting a certain resurrection which was likely to bring even greater sorrow to the mourning family than death itself. Further, in response to inquiries for details of Master Adam's last moments, the sacristan had shaken his head significantly, with the air of a man who does not wish to reveal anything, but who is willing that his hearers would divine whatever they please.

These half revelations reached the ears of Gelsomina's aunt in due course, and she, believing that nothing could happen in this world worse than the leaving of it, acquainted her niece with the rumors, which Fra Bracalone alone could confirm or deny. Hope is the last thing to die in the heart of man;

and Gelsomina began to hope, without knowing what she hoped for or why.

Just at this moment Fra Bracalone himself appeared with his ass around the corner of the lane. The young girl wished to run to meet him, but her aunt restrained her. As the sacristan was about to pass the house, Brandi stepped out, and barring the path, begged the worthy man to enter.

The sacristan recognized his old acquaintance whom he, like the rest of the neighbors, believed to be the corporal's comrade, and realizing that sooner or later Gelsomina must know the truth, he preferred that she should learn it from his own lips, with all the alleviating circumstances which his kindly circumspection and the facts of the case would suggest.

Fra Bracalone had hinted truly that the news which he brought was worse than what they knew already. It was difficult, indeed, for those who had known of his long and arduous struggle against poverty to imagine Master Adam in league with a band of robbers, and feigning death so that he might share the money stolen from the state in the very church where he was to be buried. So varying and

violent, therefore, were the emotions which the story evoked in Gelsomina that at the close of Fra Bracalone's narrative she fell swooning into the arms of her lover.

Marco Brandi was a shrewd man and knew by experience that the fainting fits of women are often long in duration, but are rarely dangerous. So he placed his betrothed in the care of her aunt, and taking the sacristan into another room, begged him to retell the facts in fuller detail.

There was little which will be fresh to the reader in the particulars which Marco now learnt for the first time.

As we know, the worthy father had quitted the church when he remembered that he had neglected to keep one of the promises made to "the dead." After an absence of about ten minutes, he had returned with the holy robe and heard loud noises coming from the church which he had left silent as the grave. Approaching on tiptoe, he had pushed the door open softly and discovered that the choir had been invaded by a horde of brigands, who were sharing a pile of gold. Fra Bracalone, who did not make the least pretense to bravery, never for an in-

stant dreamed of attacking this formidable crowd by himself. He withdrew as silently as he could, and went to lay information before the judge.

At the door of the worthy magistrate, who held a high position in the Calabrian and Sicilian villages, the monk found the escort which had accompanied the mail. They had rallied from their fright, and now sought the same authority with the same object as himself. The disgrace of having been dispersed almost without striking a blow, the fear of the poverty which would naturally follow the loss of the money committed to their care, the thought of the advancement which would be theirs if they could contrive to take their revenge and recover the money which they had allowed the robbers to take from them, the ease with which they would be able to capture the robbers when they least expected capture—all these considerations restored to the sbirri the courage which for a moment they had lost.

Guided by Fra Bracalone, they reached the abbey at the very moment when Master Adam had put the bandits to flight by rising in his coffin and thundering forth those terrible words: "Soul from purgatory!"

Our readers will easily guess the rest. The captors, instead of encountering Paolo and his brother thieves, had found in the church only Master Adam and his friend Matteo. But as the stolen money was there, and as these two elderly personages were surrounded by loaded firearms, it was evident that they were the accomplices, if not the chiefs, of that terrible band of brigands which was the scourge of the neighborhood. Some people went so far as to hint that "Marco Brandi" was only a *nom de guerre* adopted by Master Adam, and that there was no Marco Brandi in existence if he was not identical with the respectable painter himself.

Master Adam and Matteo had been taken to the village lockup and the incriminating gold and guns were deposited with the judge.

As Fra Bracalone told his tale, the mystery which had surrounded the sudden and unexpected conversion of Paolo and his comrades gradually solved itself in the listener's mind. He alone knew, better than any one, of the real existence of Marco Brandi and the innocence of Master Adam. But one thing the ex-chief was still at a loss to understand—why the old man had feigned death, and so brought about

such terrible consequences to himself. But on this point his informant could tell him no more than he already knew, and Marco therefore took leave of the kindly sacristan, who resumed his journey to Nicotera, while the young man returned to his sweetheart.

She had recovered from her swoon, but a terrible fever had now taken possession of her. As Marco, uneasy in his mind, approached the bed, he noticed that her words were few and curt, that her breath came quick and short, and that her eyes had an unwonted brilliance. Gelsomina recognized her lover, but there was something of fear and dread mingled with the recognition. She had realized that this last misfortune which had befallen the family was due, as were the others, to Marco Brandi; and the fatality with which his doings reacted upon her people began to terrify her. His first appearance in the village had brought about the ruin of old Adam's credit as a painter, the second had endangered her brother's life and nearly broken her father's heart, and the third had now wrecked the old man's good name.

As these same thoughts had already passed through Marco Brandi's own mind, he had little dif-

ficulty in discovering the reason for the young girl's sudden coldness toward him.

The fever presently became more and more intense, and a few incoherent words which escaped from the parched lips told of the coming of delirium. Marco endeavored to take his betrothed's hand; she drew it away. He seated himself behind the bed-head, so that he might not be seen by Gelsomina, who in her growing delirium began to call upon her father in accents of the most heartrending sorrow. Soon she seemed to have forgotten her lover completely, and if by chance she spoke of him it was in a tone of reproach which wounded the listener's heart cruelly.

Marco began to feel that this could not go on much longer. Delicate and highly strung as Gelsomina was, she would be dead after three days of such suffering. The only way to save her life was to restore her father to her arms.

He hesitated no longer.

At length the violence of the fever began to subside; the young girl's rambling chatter ceased by degrees, and exhaustion and stillness succeeded the state of exaltation and delirium. A sleep, broken at

intervals by fits of trembling, fell upon the sufferer. The lover took advantage of the lull, and sitting at a table near the bed, he scribbled a few lines on a slip of paper. Then he placed in a box the money which he had obtained from his father and laid the letter on the lid. Lastly, he stepped softly to the bedside where his betrothed lay, pressed his lips upon hers, passionately and lingeringly, whispered a last farewell and left the house unknown to any one.

Next morning, when Gelsomina opened her eyes, the first person she saw at her bedside was her father.

She uttered a cry, for she thought this must be one of the phantoms conjured up by the fever; but the old man took her in his arms, and his tears and kisses soon convinced her that it was no dream.

The young girl was eager to know how he came there, for she had believed him a prisoner and threatened with capital punishment. Her father, it seemed, scarcely knew himself how it had happened.

At two o'clock that morning the judge had entered his cell and announced to him that he was free. Master Adam did not need to be told twice; he had run to tell the glad news to Babilana; and then,

thinking of his daughter's probable distress of mind, whether she thought him dead or only a prisoner, he had started off at once for Tropea, where he had arrived only a few moments before she opened her eyes.

There was so much in all this that was inexplicable that it forced Gelsomina's confused wits to gather together their scattered recollections of the previous night's events. She began by vaguely remembering to have seen Marco, and as the memory of his visit became clearer, she reproached herself for having treated him so coldly. But from this stage of her recollection onward she could think of nothing but the ardent kiss which had pierced her slumber and which still seemed to linger on her lips.

She looked around her anxiously; Marco Brandi was not there. From the moment when her father was out of danger and returned to her all the tender feelings of her heart turned once more to her lover. She called for Marco, but no Marco appeared.

It was her aunt who answered the call. She was able to give the girl at least some little news of her lover. Young Brandi had left the house the evening before, without telling the good woman whither

he was bound, but saying that he had left a letter for Gelsomina. Master Adam, indeed, had only to turn his head to espy the letter, laid on the coffer.

Gelsomina took it from him and read this:

"You were right, Gelsomina; it is I who have caused all the misfortunes of your family, and it is my duty to atone for them. There is only one way of saving the innocent; that is, to deliver up the guilty. To-morrow your father will be free!

"The contents of the coffer belong to your father; they will prove but a poor compensation for the money I have caused him to lose and the misery I have brought upon him.

"Adieu! I no longer ask for your love; I only implore your pardon.

"MARCO BRANDI."

Master Adam opened the coffer, hoping to find some further news of its donor; but he only discovered 20,000 francs, which Marco had received from his father.

"Let us start for Nicotera this minute!" cried Gelsomina, raising herself in bed. "I must see him again before he dies!"

CHAPTER XII

THE WEDDING DRESS

GELSOMINA'S wish, sacred as it was, could not be gratified. When father and daughter arrived at Nicotera they found that the prisoner was in strict and solitary confinement.

Marco Brandi was one of the most important captures that the government had ever made, and the authorities took the more interest in the case as this audacious highwayman had occasionally presumed to share with them the rates and taxes for the public treasury. The Neapolitan Government, like other governments, and even more than most, was determined that the contributions of the taxpayers should not be diverted on their way to the governmental purse. So that Marco Brandi had not only no hope of pardon, but was treated, while awaiting death, with far greater severity than would have fallen to the lot of an ordinary bandit who had been wise

enough to respect the public coffers and rob only private individuals.

The trial was short. It is true that the prisoner, faithless to parental tradition, made no effort to prolong the hearing. He confessed his misdeeds at once and without reserve. Justice, in turn, did not keep him waiting long, and he was duly condemned to death.

At this news Gelsomina, who had not fully recovered from her first illness, relapsed into a more dangerous state than ever. On the first occasion she had reproached her lover with having ruined her father; now she accused her father of having killed her lover. For some time this wretched household had, it seemed, been flung by Fate from one sorrow to another.

In this emergency, Master Adam, usually so resourceful, could do nothing but mingle his tears with those of his daughter. He had thought of going and throwing himself at the king's feet and asking pardon for the young brigand, reminding the monarch that it was he who painted Notre Dame of Mount Carmel on the victorious standards of the king's general, Cardinal Ruffo. But not only was it

twenty years since the painter had rendered that service to royalty, which it was therefore very likely that Ferdinand had forgotten, but at least twelve or fifteen days' grace would be required to journey to Naples and back, and the execution was fixed for two days hence. He could only await the upshot of events and trust in God.

Brandi had heard the verdict of the court with unmoved face and without either disdain or braggadocio. From the day when he had made up his mind to give his life to save Master Adam's he had bravely faced all the consequences of his sacrifice and had familiarized himself, little by little, with the idea of death. This feeling of resignation, in which his courage alone would have upheld him, was strengthened by the cruel belief which had entered his mind on the night when Gelsomina called to Heaven to restore her father to her. He believed that the young girl had ceased to love him, and what was life to him without her love?

The poor fellow was far from suspecting that all the time he was preparing to die for her father, Gelsomina was dying because of him. She had made every effort to see Marco, but the privilege was

cruelly refused her. The authorities were afraid that some friend, if allowed to visit the condemned, might convey to him the means of defrauding justice of its due. They wished to make an example of some one, and Marco Brandi was chosen to serve as the "awful warning" to Lower Calabria, the moral sense of which, they considered, he had so shocked by his wicked conduct.

Meanwhile Master Adam never quitted his daughter's bedside. The poor father, who lived only in his child, seemed as if about to die with her. Night or day, he never went out of sight of her, weeping when she slept, smiling when she awoke. Each day Fra Bracalone, who had become quite the friend of the family, brought the pick of his provisions for the use of the household. But Babilana exhausted her culinary ingenuity in vain on these excellent viands; no one but herself made any pretense of tasting them. Sometimes Master Adam would drink the broth with which Gelsomina had just moistened her lips; that was all. It was wonderful how he managed to live, finding food and drink only in his paternal sorrow.

Gelsomina was no longer the same girl. Her

freakish whims and capricious desires had disappeared; she was gentle and tremulous as a wounded deer, and her father dreaded this resigned mood even more than her former despair.

At times Fra Bracalone, who dabbled a little in medicine, felt Gelsomina's pulse; and then, coming away from the sick bed, clacked his tongue with significant sadness and shook his head mournfully. The good man thought no more now of holy images, blessed cakes or even of his wonderful snuff. He was wont to do his best to prevent the healthy from falling sick, but he did not venture to try his hand upon the really ill. Nor did he, among his personal friends, pretend to have any great faith in the relics and amulets so sought after by the public and which he distributed with a lavish carelessness which should have enlightened those credulous souls as to the value which the worthy sacristan set upon the relics.

Her parents had tried to keep from Gelsomina the news of her lover's condemnation to death; but it was proclaimed in the streets to the rumbling of the drum, and the girl, hearing the sound, which only accompanied solemn ceremonials in the village, had

listened to the announcement with all the more acuteness as she saw that her father was trying to distract her attention.

She laid her hand on her father's mouth, and, half rising in bed, had caught the crier's last words, which announced the execution for the morrow. Then she had fallen back upon her pillow, motionless and with closed eyes. From that moment her lips alone showed any signs of life.

She had lain for some time thus, when she heard the footsteps of Fra Bracalone, who had come, according to his custom, to visit the sick girl. Gelsomina turned to her father and begged him to leave her alone with the sacristan. Master Adam, who had by now become simply a machine, wound up to obey her slightest wish, rose from his seat and left the room, slowly and mechanically.

Gelsomina reopened her eyes, which were burning with fever, and motioned to Fra Bracalone to seat himself by the bedside.

"Father," she said, when he had done so, "I must see him!"

"You know, my dear child, that that is impossible. He is in solitary confinement."

"Father," continued Gelsomina, "I have always understood that those condemned to death pass their last night in a *chapelle ardente.*"

"That is so," murmured the priest.

"Well, to-night is his last night on earth. Where will he pass it?"

"In the Abbey Church."

"Father!" cried the girl again, seizing the sacristan's hands with an energy of which one would not have thought her capable, "it is *your* church! You can take me there by some private door. No one can free him from the chain which will bind him to the pillar; his guards, too, will be there. You could stay by the door, where we should go in and out. You would have nothing to fear."

"But what do you want to do, my poor child? To see him again would only make the separation the more painful."

"If he must die, father, I should like him at least to die—my husband. It is I who have killed him; I want the right to wear mourning for him for the rest of my life. All the arrangements had been made, we only waited to name the day. God has fixed the day; I accept it."

"But your father and mother——?"

"They will go with me to the altar."

"It is impossible!"

"You promised to persuade the prior to marry me; that is all I ask now. See, open that coffer, and take what money you will need."

"But how will you have the strength?" asked the father, without even turning his head toward the box.

"Do not trouble yourself on that score, father; I will answer for that."

"Well, well," replied the sacristan; "we must do as you wish, I suppose."

Gelsomina seized his hand and kissed it.

"Go and arrange with Father Gaetano," she said, "and I will make my own preparations."

Fra Bracalone went out, and Gelsomina called her father and mother into the room.

"I am going to be married to Marco," she said; "you will attend me to the altar, won't you, father; won't you, mother?"

The old people fancied that she had gone mad, and began to sob.

"There is no time to lose; I must get my clothes

ready," continued Gelsomina, her eyes shining with feverish brilliancy. "A white robe, that is all; a robe which will serve me for my wedding and my burial. Send for Gidsa and Laura; they will come and help me."

These were two of Gelsomina's friends.

Master Adam and old Babilana went away, the one to fetch the young girls, the other to buy the cloth which Gelsomina required. Both believed they were obeying the mad fantasy of her fever, but they loved their daughter too well to refuse her anything.

Soon Master Adam returned with Gidsa and Laura, and five minutes later Babilana entered with the cloth.

"My friends," said Gelsomina, raising herself in the bed, "you will help me, I know, for this robe must be made by to-night."

The two girls looked at each other in amazement, but they bowed their heads as a sign that they were at Gelsomina's orders.

The sick girl took the scissors and cut the cloth into lengths herself. Then she gave a share of the work to each of her companions, who seated themselves on either side of the bed. Gelsomina had re-

served a third of the sewing for herself, and the three set to work. As they worked, Master Adam recited the prayers for the dead.

By night the wedding robe was made.

CHAPTER XIII

THE VIATICUM

MARCO BRANDI had been taken to the church, where he was to pass the night. In the centre of the nave, surrounded by burning tapers, stood the bier where the body of the doomed man was to lie after his execution, and a ring had been fixed to one of the pillars of the choir from which there hung a chain, long enough to allow the prisoner to reach and kneel upon the steps of the altar.

The condemned man looked upon these terrible preparations quite calmly; he only asked that his hands should be freed, so that he might join them in prayer. As he was now chained by the waist and a company of sbirri with loaded carbines were to keep him in their sight all the night through, this last grace was granted him.

The brigand was attended by a monk, who had sought him out in his prison to prepare him for death, and whom he received with that reverence

which he had always shown for the church. As we have said, it was neither from despair nor impiety, but simply because he was born, as it were, with a dagger in his belt and a carbine in his hand, that the young man had adopted the occupation in which he became so famous; therefore now, when the moment of death was not far off, he avoided any parade or swagger and accepted with gratitude the Heavenly consolation offered to him. Nevertheless, whether it was that he did not wish to abuse the devotion of his spiritual adviser, or whether he wished to think over the holy man's exhortations in silence, Marco insisted that the worthy father should take some rest.

The monk, considering that he left his charge in a holy place where the sight of all things around him should keep his thoughts in pious mood, did not fear to leave the condemned man alone, and withdrew, promising to return at five in the morning.

Marco Brandi commenced by praying. Then, seating himself at the foot of a column, he was soon so deeply plunged in thought that he seemed to be one of the statues of saints which stood on either side of him, so motionless was he.

For nearly an hour he remained thus, seemingly without life or motion, so entirely was he concentrated in thought, when he was aroused from his stupor by the sound of an opening door. He turned his eyes mechanically toward the spot whence the sound came, and there saw what seemed to him to be more like a vision than a reality.

Gelsomina, looking pale and sad, robed entirely in white, like a bride or like the dead, and wearing a bridal wreath, approached, followed by Master Adam and old Babilana. The parents stopped some distance away, but Gelsomina continued to draw near to Marco, who, as she advanced, rose slowly from his seat, not knowing whether to believe his eyes.

At length Gelsomina stopped before him.

"It is I, beloved," she said. "God did not choose that we should be united in this world, but He awaits us in Heaven."

"You still love me, then?" cried Marco.

"Look in my face and doubt it if you can! Am I not pale enough, am I not sick enough, am I not dying? We shall part for only a little while. Go, and you shall not wait long for me."

"Oh, God, God! how can I thank Thee!" cried Marco; "for now I can die happy, since I am sure of her love. But we have no time to lose; it is morning already."

"Listen," said Gelsomina, and as she spoke there fell upon their ears the first solemn notes of the clanging bell. "It is Fra Bracalone who is ringing for our marriage mass, and here is the Prior Gaetano, who comes to speak it."

At that moment a door in the choir opened, and the old prior, slowly and solemnly, ascended the steps of the altar, holding before his breast and bowed head the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then Marco Brandi understood, and his love for Gelsomina deepened, if possible, more and more in his admiration for the woman who came, in the face of death, to give herself to him whom the world rejected. All earthly thoughts and ambitions passed away from Marco, and the two lovers, calm and content, advanced quietly toward the altar, for the prisoner's chain, as we have said, allowed him liberty enough to kneel upon the steps.

At that moment the doors of the church opened, and the people of Nicotera, summoned by the voice

of the bell and brought thither by curiosity, entered in a crowd, not knowing what they were about to see and amazed at what followed.

And now, in this little corner of the earth, in the poor little church of this wretched village, occurred one of those truly solemn scenes so rarely met with either in the history of men or of nations. It was, indeed, a marriage of two souls, for the bodies of the lovers were already pledged—one to human justice, the other to divine pity—and the grave which was to separate them was already present!

At last the mass drew to a close, and the husband was placing the ring upon the finger of the wife, when a last spectator entered, who alone was lacking to the picture.

It was the executioner.

At the sight of him, the slight glow of life which during the ceremony had supported the young girl, appeared to die away instantly. Marco Brandi felt the hand which he held turn cold between his own, and Gelsomina would have fallen her full length upon the stones of the church if her old mother and neighbor Matteo had not caught her in their arms. As for Master Adam, crushed by the weight of his

despair, he stood, without voice or movement, clinging for support to one of the pillars.

They parted the chained husband and the swooning wife; the peasants left the church in the wake of the prisoner; the penitents took up the bier and followed the procession. But Master Adam showed no sign of any knowledge of what was passing around him. As soon as he was alone, however, as if solitude and silence brought back his sorrow, he looked about him.

Seeing the church deserted, his breast heaved and a sob escaped him. Then, flinging himself upon his face on the cold stones of the aisle:

"Oh, my God!" he cried; "there is none but Thee can save them now!"

"He will save them," said a voice behind the old man's shoulder. The poor father turned round quickly and perceived Fra Bracalone.

"What! But how?" he cried.

"By a holy idea, which He has sent to His humble servant," replied the sacristan.

"What—what?" murmured the old man.

"At what hour should the execution take place?"

"At five," replied Master Adam.

"At half-past four send and ask for the holy viaticum."

"And after——?" asked the old man, who began to understand.

"Leave it to me," replied Fra Bracalone.

"Ah, my God, my God!" cried Master Adam, rushing from the church, "if only she be not dead already!"

The brigand had been taken back to prison between his confessor and executioner, and the two hours of life which remained to him were to be devoted to preparations for Heaven and for death. The work of both these men was easy. Marco was already far from earth in spirit, and was fully reconciled to the dolorous formality before him.

When the hour sounded he left the prison with a firm step and showed himself to the people gathered in crowds about the prison gate, not only with a calm face, but with smiling lips. On the threshold he stopped and took advantage of his position to thank those around him for having cared to assist at his marriage and at his death. Then, having embraced the confessor and executioner, he mounted the ass with his hands bound and his face turned toward the

tail, so that he might not lose sight of the bier, which was carried behind him by penitents singing the "De Profundis."

They traversed the whole of the town thus, for the execution was to take place at the spot on the highway where the robbery had been committed, of which Master Adam had been accused and of which Marco had confessed himself guilty. As a consequence the condemned man must pass before the house where Gelsomina lay in her agony, for the young girl's home stood between the village and the little abbey church.

This was the last ordeal reserved for Marco Brandi, and the only favor he had begged for was that he should be taken to his place of punishment by another road. But the judge, who would have thought it a violation of his duty to yield to any humane instinct, had not deigned even to reply to his prayer. The procession, then, followed the road arranged for it, and at length drew near Master Adam's house. Happily for Marco, seated as he was, he could not see what he was approaching, for Italian justice, as we have said, provides that a criminal shall advance back foremost, so that instead

of viewing the scaffold where he is about to suffer, he shall keep before his eyes the tomb where he will suffer no longer.

Nevertheless, by the familiar sights which he passed, Marco could soon divine that he was now only a very little distance from that door which he had entered so often, under such different circumstances, and which he was about to pass for the last time.

Presently, as if every one felt a deep pity for the poor child who would be a widow before she was a wife, the singing ceased; all voices were hushed and a profound silence fell upon the crowd, who continued on their way with bowed heads. Marco Brandi glanced round and saw that all the shutters of that hospitable house were closed. The door only was open, and on its threshold knelt Master Adam and old Babilana, praying.

The procession continued on its gloomy way and had left the house almost a hundred paces behind when the even, silvery tinkling of a little bell broke the deathlike silence.

At the same moment, round the corner of the street, there appeared a little chorister, bearing in his

hands a silver crucifix. Then Fra Bracalone, swinging with all the precision of long practice the little bell whose silver tongue they had just heard, and lastly the good Prior Gaetano, who, yielding to the appeal of Master Adam, was bringing the holy viaticum to his daughter.

The crowd with one voice gave a cry of joy, for every one saw what was going to happen.

The mournful procession stopped instantly. Brandi was helped down from the ass, and judge, victim, executioner, penitents, peasants and sbirri all knelt to let the holy symbol pass by. But, instead of passing on, the prior stopped before the judge, and raising aloft the chalice containing the Host, which he was carrying to the dying, he said:

"Judge, I adjure you, in the name of the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, now present with us, to set free the hands of your prisoner; for all the condemned who meet the holy viaticum on their way to death escape the justice of earth, pardoned of right by the mercy of Heaven!"

The judge bowed his head in sign of obedience and turned to unbind the hands of his prisoner. Then Don Gaetano, preceded by the chorister and

Fra Bracalone, resumed his way, followed by judge, criminal, executioner, penitents, people and sbirri, for it is the custom in Italy that all who encounter the holy viaticum should follow it to the house of the dying.

Gelsomina, in spite of the pains taken by the crowd, had heard it pass, and made an effort to rise and look once again upon him whom she would nevermore see in this life. But her strength, weakened by so much suffering, failed her, and she had fallen back upon her bed, her eyes closed, her face as pale as if she were already dead.

In this state of semi-death she heard the sound of the bell; she heard the steps of the man of God as he approached her bedside, and heard, too, the house fill with the crowd. But all this was powerless to draw her from her stupor.

Suddenly a hand clasped hers, and at the touch she opened her eyes instantly.

At one side of the bed stood Marco Brandi and by the other Don Gaetano. All around, on their knees, she saw her father and mother and as many of the crowd as the poor little house would hold.

The sick girl gazed wonderingly around the room. Then her eyes fell once more upon Marco.

"Are we dead," she asked, "and in Heaven?"

"No," replied her lover; "we are living—yes, and blessed upon earth."

"Now," said Father Gaetano, "*Recevez en Chretienne le Dieu qui vous sauve!*" And having touched with the Host the pale lips of the young girl, he left the room, accompanied by the whole assembly, who religiously escorted him back to the church door.

There was left only Marco Brandi, who remained with Gelsomina, never to be parted from her.

PROLOGUE BY WAY OF EPILOGUE

SAINT PHILOMELA

I WAS at Naples in 1835, at the time when every one was talking of the miracles of St. Philomela.

All our readers will have heard of this holy lady, although she is a saint of quite modern creation—no further back than 1827 or 1828, at the earliest. Nevertheless, her doings made such a sensation at this time that she had already obtained a bigger reputation than many a holy person who achieved martyrdom in the days of Tiberius or Caligula. This fame extended beyond the frontiers of Italy, for, after having been present at what may be called the *début* of the saint in Naples, I found on my travels that she was already held in great veneration in Belgium, in Germany and even in France, where we do not, as a rule, revere anything very much.

Tidings of St. Philomela came to us, however, in the height of her fame, and dazzled by the splendor of her light, we threw ourselves on our faces before

her and adored her, not asking why or whence she came. This, however, the most interesting part of her miraculous life, was as yet unknown to us, being obscure and concealed from the world.

Now, to me, any new fact or story of the early life of Cæsar, Charlemagne or Napoleon is more interesting, I confess, than any description of the battles of Pharsala, Roncesvaux or Austerlitz, the details of which I know by heart. Therefore I was not content with knowing of the present glory of the saint; and, turning my back upon the future, I determined to ascend the blessed river, so majestically flowing down to its sea of world-wide adoration. Persevering on my way and advancing, with my accustomed patience, from miracle to miracle, I arrived at last at the source. It is with the earliest sayings and doings of the saint that I propose to entertain my readers and transcribe them, if I can, in all their artlessness and without presuming to draw any philosophical or moral deduction from them. I shall take to heart the motto of M. de Barante:

"Scribitur ad narrandum, non ad probandum."

My readers know, of course, how the first saints were created. In these days, when holy men no

longer have martyrdom to fear, and great virtues have therefore nothing to hope for, canonization becomes more and more rare. This had raised the price of genuine ancient relics to such a height that one could no longer hope to possess them, unless one could boast, like the city of Paris, of an income of thirty or forty millions. This state of things (so say those unbelieving persons who make fun of everything religious) was most humiliating for those cities which, being less favored than others by religion or fortune, had neither any exclusive relics of their own nor the money to afford themselves a saint from elsewhere. As a result of this the capital of a department, like Arras, for example, had never been able to secure more than three hairs of the Virgin, while a miserable village like Saint Maurice owns six thousand skeletons of the Theban legion. Such an unfair division of holy tokens was quite enough to bring about, in time, such a revolution for the re-distribution of things spiritual, as had already taken place with regard to things temporal.

Happily, Pope Leo XII anticipated and forestalled such a calamity by proclaiming to every city, town and village which did not possess a saint, and

which desired to procure one, that they could help themselves from the catacombs at Rome, where they would find bones of such, of all ranks, ages and sex.

It was an excellent idea, and one which it is difficult to understand had never been utilized before, for the catacombs having been exclusively the burial place of the early Christians, the faithful could take their saints from them without any misgiving, certain that even if they made the choice entirely by chance, they could not by mistake pick out an apocryphal saint or an unauthentic relic.

This wise concession bore its due fruit, and from that time forward there was no village, however poor and insignificant, which did not possess, if not the entire frame, at least the shoulder-blade or shinbone of some early martyr. The result of this was a general revival of faith, altogether gratifying to the successors of Leo XII, who have ever since had reason to applaud that Pope's happy inspiration.

It is well known how the Latin nations, and the Italians in particular, have overlaid with error and superstition a religion so simple and grand in its essential nature; and our story is only one proof the more of this truth, that ignorance and fanaticism

can disfigure, with their ridiculous practices, the most sacred things. Let it be understood, then, that it is of false and not of true worship that we are about to speak.

Toward the close of 1826 the people of a little hamlet some leagues from Naples, called Mugnano, had the misfortune to lose their pastor. He was one of those good, worthy priests, who, without any desire for fame or fortune, are content to lead their flocks into higher paths by the example of their own good lives and deeds. As a consequence, the old man, although he had found his church without any relic of any kind, had never thought of profiting by the benefits of Leo XII's ordinance, and had left his parishioners (who, in default of a saint of their own, had placed themselves under the protection of St. Antony) to continue peacefully in the paths which their fathers had trod before them.

At his death, however, this good man was succeeded in his high office by the curate of Sainte Claire, who had a crow to pluck with his predecessor respecting one of the Italian Madonnas, and who therefore bore him a grudge.

The new curé was no sooner installed in his new

sphere of work than the idea came to him to set up altar against altar, and to pay back to that Madonna of discord the trouble which she had caused him. He at once proceeded to open the eyes of his people to the "nakedness of the land" in respect of relics; and when the desire for some visible token of sanctity became generally felt among them, he suggested that he should visit Rome, promising to bring back the best specimen he could obtain of saintliness, male or female.

The majority of his flock preferred a female saint, and, above all, a young and comely one (so great a part does love play in religion and religion in love with this sensual race), and the priest undertook, as far as lay in his power, to bring them a protectress instead of a protector. It is possible that the people had decided in favor of a female saint for fear lest St. Antony (who so far had given them cause for praise rather than complaint) should feel offended at the appointment of a successor, while the same feeling of rivalry could not exist in the case of a woman, to whom the laws of polite society require that all men, even saints, shall give precedence.

These arrangements made, the clerical ambassa-

dor set out for Rome, visited the catacombs, placed in a box the first bones he came to, got them baptized and blessed by the Pope, under the melodious name of Philomela, and returned with them to his people, who were overjoyed to possess at last a saint of their own and after their own heart. This, however, did not keep the people of Mugnano from continuing their devotional attitude toward their old protector, for it was only the most sentimental and enthusiastic of them who entirely gave up the worship of the patriarchal saint for their new and poetic patron.

But St. Antony had not lived a hundred and five years on this earth of ours without knowing how fickle and ungrateful is the human heart. He did not show the least ill-humor on account of this division of devotion, and permitted the new and permanent guest in the church of Mugnano to be installed without any disturbance on his part.

Whether it was due to timidity or to lack of opportunity, the new saint, in spite of all expectation, gave no sign of existence for nearly a year. Things went on just as they did under St. Antony's undisputed reign—that is to say, neither better nor worse. The pastor said two masses instead of one; other-

wise the parishioners found no change in the order of things.

Meanwhile it chanced that the only son of a Nocera cattle dealer fell ill with a kind of paralysis. His father, who was devoted to him, called in the best doctors in Naples; but all their skill and energy seemed to be thrown away, so tenacious was the disease. After the doctors, the quacks were tried; but all their pills and powders brought no result.

At length the poor father, turning his eyes from earth to Heaven, prayed for a miracle, no longer hoping for a cure. But whether it was because the seven Madonnas, to whom he addressed himself in turn, took offense at not being asked exclusively and directly, or whether their powers of intercession had been exhausted by reason of the long list of appeals standing to their names, it is certain that things remained as they were and that the Madonnas appeared to be as powerless as the doctors and the quacks.

The poor farmer knew not which saint he should turn to next, and he was returning from Naples one day, full of despair, when he met on the road one of his friends who lived at Sarno.

"Well, how is our patient?" asked the friend, judging by the farmer's saddened face of the alarming state of the invalid. "He doesn't get any better, then?"

"Don't talk about it," answered the farmer, brushing away a tear with the back of his hand; "I am going crazy, I think."

"Why?"

"Because I don't know where to turn next. I thought of trying St. Januarius, and yet——"

"Pooh!" cried his friend; "St. Januarius is played out! It is as much as he can do to work his own miracles. His own business takes up all his time, and he has none to spare for strangers."

"Then what's to be done?" asked the farmer, sighing.

"Listen," said the friend, "I'll give you a bit of advice."

"Yes?"

"Do you know what I should do in your place?"

"No, of course I don't, since I'm asking you."

"Well, I should simply try St. Philomela. She's a new saint, with a reputation to make. Go to her. The case is desperate, isn't it?"

"Alas! yes."

"Then, if St. Philomela does no good, she can at least do no harm. Try her, my friend."

"By Jove!" said the farmer, "I think you are right, and I'll take your advice."

And as the two friends had reached the spot where the road branched off into their different directions they separated.

Next day the farmer determined to put his resolve into execution. He set out for Mugnano at daybreak and attended mass devoutly. Then, when the service was over and the church had emptied, he fell on his knees before the holy lady's shrine, promising, in case of her successful intervention, a gift which showed how truly the old man loved his son.

He had vowed to give St. Philomela all the cows which should follow the bull on the day that the poor paralytic could open the door of the stable himself.

From that day forth a noticeable improvement came over the condition of the farmer's son. Six weeks later he rose from the bed of sickness where he had been lying for more than a year, and crossing the yard without assistance, in full view of the

household and all the neighbors, he accomplished to the letter the saint's part of the bargain.

Nineteen out of thirty cows followed the bull.

The farmer was both rejoiced to find his son recovered and sad to think that the young man's renewed health would cost him so dearly. St. Philomela had worked the miracle, it was true; but she had made him pay through the nose for the service.

At this stage the farmer bethought him of the friend who had given him such good advice before, and he was not without hope that his *compère* would help him out of his fix a second time. He took his hat and stick and set out for Sarno.

The news of the miracle had already reached that village, and the farmer's sad face was therefore an object of astonishment to his friend.

"Well," he asked, "isn't the news I hear true, then?"

"Oh, good heavens, yes," answered the farmer.

"Then you ought to be happy."

"Yes, very happy; only I'm two-thirds ruined."

"How's that?"

"It's very soon told. I vowed that when my son

was able to open the stable door himself I would give St. Philomela all the cows that followed the bull."

"Well?"

"Well, he opened the stable door yesterday, and out of the thirty cows in the cow house, nineteen came out."

"The devil! That's very awkward. You don't want to break your vow?"

"God forbid!"

"Then there's only one thing to be done."

"What is that?"

"This. When you take the cows to the pastor of Mugnano (who is probably the saint's man of business), take at the same time half their value in money. It is most unlikely that the good man, who won't be expecting such a windfall, will have a purchaser ready for the nineteen cows, and less likely still that he'll want to drive them to Naples market. Such a present will only embarrass him. Offer him half the worth of the cows in money, and try that. If he accepts, which he's almost sure to do, you will only lose nine cows and a half and you will only be ruined one-third."

"By Jove!" cried the farmer in genuine admira-

tion, "you're the best friend I have. That's it; I'll go over to Mugnano to-morrow with the beasts and the money."

"H'm," said his friend. "If I were you, on second thought, I'd only take one or the other."

"Yes, but if he doesn't agree to accept just the money I've taken, I should have to go again and lose a day's work."

"Do as you like," said the adviser, "but——"

"Adieu, my friend."

"You're in a great hurry."

"What can you expect? I'm never tired of seeing that dear fellow on his legs again. Dear St. Philomela! There's a wonderful saint for you. Adieu!"

"Adieu, my friend."

And the farmer returned home, delighted at the means of escape which his friend had pointed out to him, and never doubting that it would be satisfactorily successful.

Next morning he left home, driving his nineteen cows before him and carrying in his pocket half the value of the beasts in money—that is to say, five hundred Roman ecus.

He finished his journey without hindrance and arrived at Mugnano in the pleasantest possible manner. There he drove the cattle into the courtyard of the vicarage and went upstairs to see the pastor.

The priest was much astonished to hear the farmer's news. He was, of course, quite unaware of the vow made to the saint, and consequently was at a loss to account for this invasion of his premises by the horned guests down below, who were crowded together and busily engaged in seeing which could bellow the loudest.

The mystery was explained by the farmer in a few words, and as there was nothing in all this which was not flattering to himself and respectful to his saint, the good man received the donor with a smiling face, which gave the farmer every hope of successfully concluding the negotiations which he had come to propose.

The curé, indeed, was obliging enough in the matter of cattle, for he quite saw that it would pay St. Philomela considerably better to take tribute in money than in kind. So, after haggling for a while about the price, he ended by accepting the five hundred Roman ecus which the other had brought.

The farmer went down into the courtyard, delighted to have come off so cheaply and without leaving the saint any grounds for reproaching him.

He set to work to drive the beasts out of the courtyard, but this was by no means an easy job. The cows had discovered some fresh grass growing in the shade of the high walls, and this made them deaf to all their master's orders to quit the new-found pasturage. Seeing this, the farmer went up to the beast nearest to the door, and seizing her by the tail, tried, after the example of Cacus, to make her go out backward. But the farmer's coercive measures were even less fortunate than his persuasive ones, for the cow, unaccustomed to this method of progression, clung fast to earth with her four feet, and remained as immovable as if made of bronze, bellowing lamentably the while to show her disapproval of such treatment.

This supernatural obstinacy on the part of the cow set the farmer thinking.

It seemed evident, from this, that St. Philomela did not ratify the bargain just concluded between the curé and himself, and that, contrary to the opin-

ion of her man of business, she preferred the cows to the money.

He suddenly let go the tail, to which an instant before he had been holding with all the stubborn tenacity of a Brahmin, and dashing up the stairs, four at a time, he entered the curé's room, terrified and pale, though covered with sweat, just as that worthy man was about to put the ecus away into one of the drawers of his desk.

The curé, hearing the door open, turned round and recognized the farmer.

"Well, my good man," said he, "what is it now?"

"It is this, father, that St. Philomela is displeased with the bargain you have made."

"What makes you think that?"

"The cattle won't come out of your yard."

"And you think from that——"

"That she wants the cattle, not the money."

"We'll see about that."

"How?"

"Your cows won't follow you, will they?"

"No; devil take 'em!"

"And you are convinced that it is St. Philomela who stops them from leaving?"

"Rather."

"Well, the money that you gave me is in that drawer. If, as you think, the saint prefers the cows and not the money, she would not only prevent the cows from going out, but she would prevent the money from going in. One miracle is no more difficult than the other."

"Very good," said the farmer; "then try to shove in that drawer. You will see that it won't shut."

The curé assented with a nod of the head and pushed the drawer, which went in as if by magic.

"Ah!" cried the farmer in amazement.

"You see?" said the curé.

"Well, but what does that prove?"

"It proves that we were committing a grave error, my dear friend," replied the curé, putting the key of the drawer into his pocket. "I thought that the saint wished for the money and not for the beasts."

"Yes."

"You thought that she wanted the beasts and not the money."

"Yes."

"Well, as I told you, we were both mistaken. The saint wants both the money and the cattle."

"That's true," replied the farmer; "I was wrong."

And he went home without either his cattle or his money.

Next day the curé of Mugnano refused 100,000 ducats which were offered by a speculator for the relics of St. Philomela.

It will be easily understood that with my passion for investigation I could not stay two months in Naples without paying my respects to the saint who had begun her career with such a miracle. I warned my guide that we were in for a long day's outing, and then, on a beautiful morning in October, we set out for Mugnano.

The fame of St. Philomela was still so recent that there were as yet no outward signs in the village of the material benefits of her protection. Mugnano is a pretty town, picturesque and elegant, as is every little corner of Italy where a few houses have chanced to group themselves at the foot of a church. Nothing, however, turned me aside from my errand, and I went straight to St. Philomela, whom I had come to visit.

Like St. Rosalie, of Palermo, the Virgin of Mug-

nano lies in the altar which is consecrated to her and which serves also as shrine. She is clothed in a robe of blue and gold and crowned with white roses, being a pretty waxen shape, modeled on the very bones which the curé of Mugnano had brought from Rome. She did not, at this time, possess the grand cordon of St. Januarius, with which His Majesty the King of Naples afterward decorated her on the occasion of the coming of his heir—a palpable proof that he recognized this second miracle as being no less remarkable than the first.

As the church, apart from the rich votive offerings with which it was hung, possessed no other objects of interest, I begged the guide, now that I had seen the saint, to take me to the spot where the miracle had taken place. Accordingly we went out by the little door, opening into a damp passage, and found ourselves in the Courtyard of the Cows.

There I was immediately attracted by a fresco representing the miracle. The painter had chosen the moment when the farmer, tugging at the tail of his disobedient cow, began to suspect that there was probably some supernatural reason for the animal's obstinacy. This effect was rather cleverly obtained,

and the expression of the good man's face was a singular combination of fear and amazement.

This fresco astonished me, for it exhibited at the same time an absence of technique and an artistic sense which indicated the self-taught painter. In short, it was a piece of work much above the level of the street paintings which one sees everywhere in Italy.

"Do you know, that fresco is not at all bad," said I, turning to my cicerone.

"Rather!" he answered, "I should think it isn't. It was done by Master Adam, the Calabrian. He came from Nicotera expressly to paint it."

"Who is this Master Adam?" I asked.

"You don't know him?"

"It is the first time I have heard his name."

"Ah, well, since you are always asking me for the stories belonging to the places we visit," answered my guide, "I will tell you one now."

And he narrated to me the history which I, in my turn, have told my readers.

[THE END.]