LEVER CHARLES JAMES

GERALD FITZGERALD, THE CHEVALIER: A NOVEL

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Lever C.

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Содержание

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BOOK THE FIRST

CHAPTER I. THE THIEVES' CORNER

At the foot of the hill on which stands the Campidoglio at Rome, and close beneath the ruins that now encumber the Tarpeian rock, runs a mean-looking alley, called the Viccolo D'Orsi, but better known to the police as the 'Viccolo dei Ladri,' or 'Thieves' Corner' – the epithet being, it is said, conferred in a spirit the very reverse of calumnious.

Long and straggling, and too narrow to admit of any but foot-passengers, its dwellings are marked by a degree of poverty and destitution even greater than such quarters usually exhibit. Rudely constructed of fragments taken from ancient temples and monuments, richly carved architraves and finely cut friezes are to be seen embedded amid masses of crumbling masonry, and all the evidences of a cultivated and enlightened age mingled up with the squalor and misery of present want.

Not less suggestive than the homes themselves are the population of this dreary district; and despite rags, and dirt, and debasement, there they are – the true descendants of those who once, with such terrible truth, called themselves 'Masters of the World.' Well set-on heads of massive mould, bold and prominent features, finely fashioned jaws, and lips full of vigour and sensual meaning, are but the base counterfeits of the traits that meet the eye in the Vatican. No effort of imagination is needed to trace the kindred. In every gesture, in their gait, even in the careless ease of their ragged drapery, you can mark the traditionary signs of the once haughty citizen.

With a remnant of their ancient pride, these people reject all hired occupation, and would scorn, as an act of slavery, the idea of labour; and, as neither trade nor calling prevails among them, their existence would seem an inscrutable problem, save on the hypothesis which dictated the popular title of this district. But without calling to our aid this explanation, it must be remembered how easily life is supported by those satisfied with its meanest requirements, and especially in a land so teeming with abundance. A few roots, a handful of chestnuts, a piece of black bread, a cup of wine, scarcely more costly than so much water, these are enough to maintain existence; and in their gaunt and famished faces you can see that little beyond this is accomplished.

About the middle of the alley, and over a doorway of sculptured marble, stands a small statue of Vesta, which, by the aid of a little paint, a crown of gilt paper, and a candle, some pious hands had transformed into a Madonna. A little beneath this, and on a black board, scrawled with letters of unequal size, is the word 'Trattoria' or eating-house.

Nothing, indeed, can be well further from the ordinary aspect of a tavern than the huge vaulted chamber, almost destitute of furniture, and dimly lighted by the flame of a single lamp; a few loaves of coarse black bread, some wicker-bound flasks of common wine, and a wooden bowl containing salad, laid out upon a table, constituting all that the place affords for entertainment. Some benches are ranged on either side of the table, and two or three more are gathered around a little iron tripod, supporting a pan of lighted charcoal, over which now two figures are to be seen cowering down to the weak flame, while they converse in low whispers together.

It is a cold and dreary night in December; the snow has fallen not only on the higher Apennines, but lies thickly over Albano, and is even seen in drifts along the Campagna. The wailing wind sighs mournfully through the arches of the Colosseum and among the columns of the old Forum, while at

intervals, with stronger gusts, it sweeps along the narrow alley, wafting on high the heavy curtain that closes the doorway of the Trattoria, and leaving its occupants for the time in total darkness.

Twice had this mischance occurred; and now the massive table is drawn over to the door, to aid in forming a barricade against the storm.

"Tis better not to do it, Fra Luke,' said a woman's voice, as the stout friar arranged his breastwork. 'You know what happened the last time there was a door in the same place.'

'Never mind, Mrs. Mary,' replied the other; they 're not so ready with their knives as they used to be, and, moreover, there's few of them will be out to-night.'

Both spoke in English, and with an accent which told of an Irish origin; and now, as they reseated themselves beside the brazier, we have time to observe them. The woman is scarcely above forty years of age, but she looks older from the effects of sorrow: her regular features and deeply-set eyes bear traces of former beauty. Two braids of rich brown hair have escaped beneath her humble widow's cap and fallen partly over her cheeks, and, as she tries to arrange them, her taper and delicately formed fingers proclaim her of gentle blood: her dress is of the coarsest woollen stuff worn by the peasantry, but little cuffs of crape show how, in all her poverty, she had endeavoured to maintain some semblance to a garb of mourning. The man, whose age might be fifty-seven or eight, is tall, powerfully built, and although encumbered by the long dress of a friar, shows in every motion that he is still possessed of considerable strength and activity. The closely cut hair over his forehead and temples gives something of coarseness to the character of his round full head; but his eyes are mild and gentle-looking, and there is an unmistakable good-nature in his large and thick-lipped mouth.

If there is an air of deference to his companion in the way he seats himself a little distance from the 'brazier,' there is, more markedly still, a degree of tender pity in the look that he bestows on her.

'I want to read you the petition, Mrs. Mary,' said he, drawing a small scroll of paper from his pocket, and unfolding it before the light. "Tis right you'd hear it, and see if there's anything you 'd like different – anything mispleasing you, or that you 'd wish left out.' She sighed heavily, but made no answer. He waited for a second or two, and then resumed: "Tisn't the like of me – a poor friar, ignorant as I am – knows well how to write a thing of the kind, and, moreover, to one like *him*; but maybe the time's coming when you 'll have grander and better friends.'

'Oh, no! no!' cried she passionately; 'not better, Fra Luke – not better; that they can never be.'

'Well, well, better able to serve you,' said he, as though ashamed that any question of himself should have intruded into the discussion; 'and that they may easily be. But here's the writing; and listen to it now, for it must be all copied out to-night, and ready for to-morrow morning. The cardinal goes to him at eleven. There's to be some grandees from Spain, and maybe Portugal, at twelve. The Scottish lords come after that; and then Kelly tells me he 'll see any that likes, and that has letters or petitions to give him. That's the time for us, then; for ye see, Kelly doesn't like to give it himself: he doesn't know what the Prince would say, and how he 'd take it; and, natural enough, he 'd not wish to lose the favour he's in by any mistake. That's the word he said, and sure enough it sounded a strange one for helping a friend and a countrywoman; so that I must contrive to go myself, and God's my judge, if I wouldn't rather face a drove of the wild cattle out there on the Campagna, than stand up before all them grand people!' The very thought of such an ordeal seemed too much for the poor friar, for he wiped his forehead with the loose cuff of his robe, and for some minutes appeared to be totally lost in reflection.

With a low sigh he at last resumed: 'Here it is, now; and I made it short, for Kelly said, "if it's more than one side of a sheet he 'll never look at it, but just say 'Another time, my good friend, another time. This is an affair that requires consideration; I 'll direct Monsignore to attend to it.' When he says that, it's all over with you," says Kelly. Monsignore Bargalli hates every one of us – Scotch, English, and Irish alike, and is always belying and calumniating us; but if he reads it himself, there's always a chance that he may do something, and that's the reason I made it as short as I could.'

With this preface, he flattened out the somewhat crumpled piece of paper, and read aloud:

'"To His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, the true-born descendant of the House of Stuart, and rightful heir to the Crown of England, the humble and dutiful petition of Mary Fitzgerald, of Cappa-Glyn, in the County Kildare, Ireland – "

'Eh, what?' cried he suddenly; for a scarcely audible murmur proclaimed something like dissent or correction.

'I was thinking, Fra Luke,' said she mildly, 'if it wouldn't be better not to say "of Cappa-Glyn." 'Tis gone away from us now for ever, and – and – '

'What matter – it was yours once. Your ancestors owned it for hundreds and hundreds of years; and if you're not there now, neither is he himself where he ought to be.'

The explanation seemed conclusive, and he went on:

'"County Kildare, Ireland. Ay! May it please your illustrious Royal Highness – The only sister of Grace Géraldine, now in glory with the saints, implores your royal favour for the orphan boy that survives her. Come from a long way off, in great distress of mind and body, she has no friend but your highness and the Virgin Mary – that was well known never deserted nor forsook them that stood true to your royal cause – and being in want, and having no shelter or refuge, and seeing that Gerald himself, with the blood in his veins that he has, and worthy of being what your Royal Highness knows he is – "

'That's mighty delicately expressed, ye see, not to give offence,' said the friar, with a most complacent smile at his dexterity —

'" – hasn't as much as a rag of clothes under his student's gown, nor a pair of shoes, barring the boots that the sub-rector lent him; without a shirt to his back, or a cross in his pocket; may at a minute's warning be sent away from the college by reason of his great distress – having no home to go to, nor any way to live, but to starve and die in nakedness, bringing everlasting disgrace on your royal house, and more misery to her who subscribes herself in every humility and contrite submission, your Royal Highness's most dutiful, devoted, and till death release her from sorrows, ever attached servant, Mary Fitzgerald."

'I didn't put any address,' said the Fra, 'for, you see, this isn't one of the genteelest quarters of the town. Here they are, Mrs. Mary – here they are!' cried he suddenly, and while he spoke, the hasty tramp of many feet and the discordant voices of many people talking noisily was heard from without.

'Sangue dei Santi!' shouted a rude voice, 'is this a fortress we have here, or a public tavern?' and at the same instant a strong hand seized the table in the doorway and flung it on the floor.

The fellow who thus made good his entrance was tall and muscular, his stature seeming even greater from the uncouth covering of goat-skins, which in every conceivable fashion he wore around him, while in his hand he carried a long lance, terminating with a goad, such as are used by the cattle-drivers of the Campagna.

'A hearty reception, truly, Signora Maria, you give your customers.' cried he, as he strode into the middle of the chamber.

'It was a barrier against the storm, not against our friends – '

'Ha! you there, Fra Luke!' shouted the other, interrupting him, while he burst out into a fit of coarse laughter.

'Who could doubt it, though? – wherever there's a brazier, a wine-shop, and a pretty woman, there you will find a Frate! But come in, lads,' added he, turning once more toward the doorway; 'here are only friends – neither spies nor Swiss among them.'

A ragged group of half-starved wretches now came forward, from one of whom the first speaker took a small leathern portmanteau that he carried, and threw it on the table.

'A poor night's work, lads,' said he, unstrapping the leather fastenings around it; 'but these travellers have grown so wary nowadays, it's rare to pick up anything on the Campagna; and what with chains, bolts, and padlocks around their luggage, you might as well strive to burst open the door of the old Mamertine Prison yonder. There's no money here, boys – not a baiocco – nor even clothes,

nothing but papers. Cursed be those who ever taught the art of writing! – it serves for nothing but to send brave men to the galleys.'

'I knew he was a courier,' said a small decrepit-looking man, with a long stiletto stuck in his garter, 'and that he could have nothing of any use to us.'

'Away with the trunk, then! throw it over the parapet into the ditch, and make a jolly blaze with the papers. Ah, Signora Maria, time was when a guidatore of the Campagna seldom came back at night without his purse filled with sequins. Many a gay silk kerchief have I given a sweetheart, ay, and many a gold trinket too, in those days. Cattle-driving would be but a poor trade if the Appian Way didn't traverse the plain.' While he spoke he continued to feed the flame with the papers, which he tore and threw on the burning charcoal. 'Heap them on the fire, Fra, and don't lose time spelling out their meaning. You get such a taste for learning people's secrets at the confessional, you can't restrain the passion.'

'If I mistake not,' said Fra Luke, 'these papers are worth more than double their weight in gold. They treat of very great matters, and are in the writing of great people.'

'Per Bacco! they shall never bring me to the galleys, that I'll swear,' cried the herdsman. 'Popes and princes would fret little about me when they gained their ends. There, on with them, Fra. If I see you steal one of them inside those loose robes of yours, by the blood of the martyrs, I 'll pin it to your side with my poniard.'

'You mangy, starved hound of a goatherd!' cried Fra Luke, seizing the massive iron tongs beside him; 'do you think it's one of yourselves I am, or that I have the same cowardly heart that can be frightened because you wear a knife in your sleeve? May I never see glory, if I wouldn't clear the place of you all with these ould tongs, ay, and hunt every mother's son of you down the alley.' The sudden spring forward as he said this, seeming to denote an intention of action, so appalled his hearers that they rushed simultaneously to the door, and, in all the confusion of terror, fled into the street, the herdsman making use of all his strength to cleave his way through the rest.

'Think of the Vendetta, Fra Luke! They never forgive!' tried the woman, in a voice of anguish.

'Faix, it's more of the police I 'm thinking, Mrs. Mary,' said the friar. 'You'll see, them fellows will be off now to bring the Swiss guard. Burn the papers as fast as you can; God knows what mischief we 're doing, but we can't help it. Oh dear! isn't it a sin and a shame? Here's a letter, signed Alberoni, the great Cardinal in Spain. Here's two in English, and what's the name – Watson, is it? No; Wharton, the Duke of Wharton, as I live! There, fan the coals; quick, there's no time to lose. Oh dear, what's this about Ireland! I must read this, Mrs. Mary, come what may. "Cromarty says that the P – regrets he didn't try Ireland in the place of Scotland. Kelly persuades him that the Irish would never have abandoned his cause for any consideration for themselves or their estates." That's true, anyhow,' cried the Fra. "'And that as long as he only wanted rebellion, and did not care to make them loyal subjects, the Irish would stand to him to the last." Faix, Kelly's right!' murmured the Fra. "'The Scotch, besides, grow weary of civil war, and desire to have peace and order; while the others think fighting a government the best diversion of all, and would ask for nothing better than its continuance. For these reasons, and another that is more of a secret, the Prince is sorry for the choice he made. As to the secret one: there was a certain lady of good family, one of the best in the Island, they say, called Grace Fitzgerald – "'

A shriek from the woman arrested the Fra at this instant, and with a spring forward she tore the paper from his hand to read the name.

'What of her – what of Grace?' cried she, in a voice of heartrending anxiety.

'Be calm, and I 'll read it all, Mrs. Mary. It was God's will, may be, put this into our hands to-night. There, now, don't sob and agitate yourself, but listen. "She followed him to France,"' continued he, reading.

"She did – she did!' burst out the other, in a passion of tears.

– '"To France, where they lived in retirement at the Château de Marne, in Brittany. Kelly says they were married, and that the priest who solemnised the marriage was a nephew of Cardinal Tencin, called Danneton, or Banneton, but well known as Father Ignatius, at the Seminary of Soissons. To his own dishonour and disgrace, and perhaps to his ruin also, this happy union did not long continue. He was jealous at first; at last he neglected her. Be this as it may, Godfrey Moore and O'Sullivan broke with him for ever on her account; and Ruttledge tore his patent of Baron to pieces, and swore, to his face, that one who could be so false to his love could be little relied on in his friendship.'"

'Who writes this, Fra Luke? Who knew these things so well?' cried the woman.

'It is signed "E. W.," and dated from Ancona, something more than ten years back. The remainder treats of money matters, and of names that are new to us. Here is the postscript: "You are right in your estimate of him – too right; still I am inclined to think that Kelly's influence has worked more ill than all his misfortunes. They drink together all day, and even his brother cannot see him without permission; and if you but saw the man – coarse, low-minded, and ill-educated as he is – so unlikely in every way to have gained this ascendency over one of cultivated taste and refinement; but Kinloch said truly, 'What have your Royal Highness's ancestors done, that God should have cursed you with such companionship!' To what end, then, this new plan – this last attempt to avert failure? I 'll go, if I must, but it will be only to expose myself to the same impertinences as before."

'I wish I could make out his name, or even to whom it was addressed; but it is only inscribed "G. H., care of Thomas Foster." Is that any one coming, Mrs. Mary?"

'No, it's only the wind; it often sounds like voices moaning through those old corridors,' said the woman sorrowfully. 'You'll keep that letter safe, Fra Luke:'

'That I will, Mrs. Mary. I 'll put it now with the rest, in that old iron box in the wall behind the chimney.'

'But if we should have to leave this?'

'Never fear, I 'll take care to have it where we can come at it.' He paused for a second or so, and then said, 'Yes, you can't stay here any longer; you must go at once too.'

'Let it be, then, to some spot where I can see him,' cried she eagerly. 'I 've borne the misery of this gloomy spot for years back, just because that each day he passes near my door. Down the Capitoline, to the old Forum, is their walk; and how my heart beats as I see the dark procession winding slowly down the hill, till my eyes rest on him – my own dear Gerald. How proudly he steps in all his poverty! – how sorrowful in his youth! What would I not suffer to speak to him – to tell him that I am the sister of his mother – that he is not all forgotten or forsaken, but that through long days and nights I sit to think on him!'

'But you know this cannot be, as yet.'

'I know it – I know it I' cried she bitterly. 'It is not to a home of crime and infamy – to such pollution as this – I would bring him. Nor need this any longer be endured. The slavery is now unrecompensed. I can earn nothing. It is four months since I last sent him a few pauls.'

'Come, come, do not give way thus; to-morrow may be the turn to better fortune. Ask of the Virgin to aid us – pray fervently to those who see our need, and hope – ay, hope, Mrs. Mary, for hope is faith.'

'My heart grows too cold for hope,' said she with a faint shudder; and then, with a low 'good-night,' she lighted the little lamp that stood beside her, and ascended the narrow stairs to her room, while the Fra proceeded to gather up the papers that lay scattered about: having accomplished this task, he listened for a while, to ascertain that all was quiet without, and then, drawing his cowl over his head, set out for his humble home – a small convent behind the Quirinal.

CHAPTER II. THE LEVEE

For many a year after the failure of the Jacobite expedition – long after all apprehension from that quarter had ceased to disturb the mind of England – the adherents of Charles Edward abroad continued to plot, and scheme, and plan, carrying on intrigues with nearly every court of Europe, and maintaining secret intercourse with all the disaffected at home. It would, at first sight, seem strange that partisans should maintain a cause which its chief had virtually abandoned as hopeless; but a little consideration will show us that the sympathy felt by foreign Governments for the Stuarts was less based on attachment to their house, than a devotion to the religious principles of which they were the assertors. To Catholicise England was the great object at heart – to crush that heresy, whose right of private judgment was as dangerous to despotism as to bigotry – this was a cause far too portentous and important to be forsaken for any casual check or momentary discouragement. Hence, for years after the hopes of the 'Pretender's' friends had died out in Scotland, his foreign followers traversed the Continent on secret missions in every direction, exerting at times no slight influence even in the cabinets which England believed to be best affected toward her.

There was, it is true, nothing in the state of Europe generally, nor of England itself, to revive the hopes of that party. Of the adherents to the Stuart cause, the staunchest and the best had paid the penalty of their devotion: some were exiles, and some, like Lord Lovatt, had purchased safety by dishonour, but scarcely one was to be found ready to peril life and fortune once more in so barren an enterprise. None, indeed, expected that 'the king should have his own again,' but many thought that the claim of a disputed succession might be used as a terrible agency for disturbance, and the cause of a dethroned monarch be made an admirable rallying-point for Catholic Europe. These intrigues were carried on in every court of the Continent, but more especially at Rome and Madrid, between which two capitals the emissaries of the Prince maintained a close and frequent intercourse.

With all the subtlety of such crafty counsellors, every question of real moment was transacted in the strictest secrecy, but all trivial and unimportant affairs were blazoned forth to the world with a degree of display that seemed to court publicity. In this way, for instance, every eventful era of the Stuart family was singled out for observance, and the ceremonies of the Church were employed to give the epochs a due solemnity. It is to an occasion of this kind we would now invite our reader's presence – no less a one than the birthday of Charles Edward.

From an early hour on the morning of the 20th December 178 – , the courtyard of the Altieri Palace was a scene of unusual stir and movement. Country carts, loaded with orange-trees and rare plants from the conservatories of the princely villas around Rome, great baskets of flowers – bouquets which had cost a twelvemonth's care to bring to perfection – were unpacking on every side, while delicious fruits and wines of extreme rarity were among the offerings of the auspicious day. Servants in the well-known livery of every noble house passed and repassed, and the lodge of the porter was besieged by crowds who were desirous of testifying their respect for the exiled majesty of England, even though their rank did not entitle them to be presented. The street front of the palace was decorated with gorgeous hangings from all the windows, some emblazoned with the armorial insignia of royalty, some with the emblems of different orders of knighthood, and some simply with the fleur-de-lis or the cross of St. Andrew. A guard of honour of the Pope's Swiss stood at the gate, and two trumpeters, with two heralds in full costume, were mounted on white chargers within the arched entrance, ready, when the clock struck eleven, to proclaim the birthday of the king of England.

For years back the occasion had been merely marked by a levee, at which the Prince's personal friends and followers were joined by a few cardinals and one or two of the elders among the noble families; but now, for some unexplained reason, a greater display was made, and an unusual degree of splendour and preparation betokened that the event was intended to be singled out for peculiar honour. Pickets of dragoons, stationed at intervals through the neighbouring streets, also showed that

measures were taken to secure public tranquillity, and prevent the inconvenience which might arise from overcrowded thoroughfares. That such precautions were not unneeded, the dense mass of people that now crowded the streets already showed.

Few, indeed, of the assembled multitude knew the meaning of the ceremonial before them. To most, the name of England was like that of some fabulous dream-land. Others clearly saw some vassalage to the Pope in this temporary display of royalty; a yet smaller number looked on with compassionate sorrow at this solemn mockery of a state so unreal and unsubstantial. Meanwhile, a certain cautious reserve, a degree of respectful quiet, pervaded all the arrangements within the palace. The windows of the apartments occupied by the Prince were still closed, and the noiseless tread of the servants, as they passed in that direction, showed the fear of disturbing him. For above a year back Charles Edward had been suffering severely from ill health. Two attacks of apoplexy, one following quickly on the other, had left him weak and debilitated, while from the abandonment of his habits of dissipation, enforced by his physician, there ensued that low and nervous condition, the invariable penalty exacted from debauchery.

He had lived of late years much secluded from society, passing his time in the company of a few intimates whose character and station were, indeed, but ill-adapted to his rank. Of these the chief was a certain Kelly, an Irishman, and a friar of the order of Cordeliers, with whom the Prince had become acquainted in his wanderings in Spain, and by whose influence he first grew attached to habits of low dissipation. Kelly's recommendations to favour were great personal courage, high animal spirits, and a certain dashing recklessness, that even to his latest hour had a fascination for the mind of Charles Edward. Perhaps, however, there was nothing in Kelly's character which so much disposed the Prince toward him as the confidence – real or pretended – with which he looked forward to the restoration of the exiled family, and the return of the Stuarts to the throne of England. The prophecies of Nostradamus and the predictions of Kelly fostered hopes that survived every discomfiture, and survived when there was really not even a chance for their accomplishment. This friar had become, in fact, though not formally, the head of the Prince's household, of which he affected to regulate the expenditure and watch over the conduct. The reckless waste, however, that prevailed; the insubordination of the servants; and the utter disorganisation of everything, were far from being complimentary to his administrative powers.

The income of the Prince was small and precarious. The sums contributed by Spain came irregularly. The French contingent was scarcely better paid. The Roman portion alone could be relied upon to maintain the cost of a household which, for its ill-management and profusion, was the scandal of the city. There were many rumours current of Kelly's financial resources – traits of pecuniary strategy which might have shamed a Chancellor of the Exchequer; but these, of course, were difficult to prove, and only natural to prevail on such a subject. Although there is abundant evidence of the man's debasement and immorality, it is equally well known that he amassed no wealth in the service of the Prince. We have been somewhat prolix in this reference to one who is not a chief figure in our picture, but without whom any sketch of the Stuart household would be defective. The Fra Laurentio, as he was called, was indeed a person of importance, nor was any name so often uttered as his on the eventful morning we have referred to.

Soon after ten o'clock, a certain movement in the streets, and the appearance of the dragoons waving back the populace, showed that the visitors were about to arrive; and at last a stately old coach, containing some officials of the Pope's household, drove into the courtyard. This was quickly followed by the judges of the superior courts and the secretaries of the tribunals, to whom succeeded a long line of Roman nobles, their sombre equipages broken occasionally to the eye by the scarlet panels of a cardinal or the emblazoned hammercloth of a foreign ambassador. Despite the crowd, the movement, the glitter of uniform and the gorgeous glare of costume, there was an air of indescribable gloom in the whole procession. There was none of that gorgeous courtesy, that look of pleasure, so associated with the trace of a royal birthday; on the contrary, there was an appearance of depression –

almost of shame – in the faces of the principal persons, many seeming to shrink from the public gaze and to feel abashed at the chance mention of their names by the people in the street, as they passed.

Among those who watched the proceedings with a more than common interest was a large burly man, in the brown robe of a Carthusian, whose bald, bare head overtopped the surrounders. Closely stationed near the gate, he had formed an acquaintance with a stranger who seemed familiar with almost every face that came by. The friar was our friend Fra Luke; and truly his bluff, honest features, his clear blue eye, and frank brow, were no unpleasing contrast to the treacherous expressions and gaunt, sallow cheeks on either side of him. Few of the names were familiar to the honest Carthusian; and it is but truth to say that he heard of the great Spanish diplomatist, Guadalaraxa, the wily Cardinal Acquavesia, and the intriguing envoy, Count Boyer, without a particle of interest in them; but when his informant whispered, 'There goes the Earl of Dunbar, that sallow-faced man in deep mourning; that yonder is the Irish chieftain, O'Sullivan,' then the friar's eyes brightened, and his whole countenance gleamed with animation and excitement. This faithful adherent to the Stuart cause was now in his eighty-seventh year, but still carried himself erect, and walked with the measured step of an old soldier; his three-cornered hat, trimmed with ostrich feathers, and wide-skirted blue coat, turned up with red, recalling the time of Louis xiv., of whose court he had once been a distinguished ornament. Soon after him came MacNiel of Barra, a tall, hard-visaged man, but whose muscular figure and well-knit limbs were seen to great advantage in the full dress of a Highland chieftain. He was preceded by the piper of his clan, and a henchman, with a pistol on full cock in his hand, walked after him. A few of lesser note, many of whom exhibited unmistakable signs of narrow fortune, came after these. It was a group which had gone on diminishing each year, and now, by the casualties of death, sickness, and exile, had dwindled down at last to scarcely a dozen; and even of these few, it was plain to see, some were offering the last homage they were ever like to render on earth. Equipage after equipage rolled into the court; and although a vast number had now arrived, the rumour ran that the windows of the Prince's apartment were still closed, nor was there any sign of preparation in that part of the palace. The vague doubts and surmises which prevailed among the crowd without were shared in by the guests assembled within doors. Gathered in knots, or walking slowly along through the vast salons, they conversed in low whispers together – now stopping to listen for anything that might indicate the approach of the Prince, and then relapsing into the same muttered conversation as before. So estranged had Charles Edward lived latterly from all his former associates, that it was in vain to ask for any explanation from those whose titles implied the duties of his household; and Keith, Murray, MacNiel, and Upton frankly avowed that they were as great strangers within those walls as any of those who now came to offer their formal compliments. Kelly alone, it would seem, by the frequent mention of his name, could account for the Prince's absence; and yet Kelly was not to be found.

Ill-regulated and ill-ordered as were all the arrangements of that household, there seemed something beyond all bounds in this neglect of fitting courtesy; and many did not scruple to say aloud how deeply they felt the insult. At one moment they half resolved on deputing a message to the chamber of the Prince; at another they discussed the propriety of departing in a body. Various opinions were given as to the most fitting course to follow; in the midst of which their debate was interrupted by the hoarse flourish of trumpets without, and the loud-voiced proclamation by the heralds, 'That his Majesty of England had entered into his fifty-second year.' A faint cheer – the tribute of the careless crowd in the street – and a salvo of cannon from the Quirinal, closed the ceremony, and all was still – so still that for some seconds not a word was heard in those thronged and crowded salons.

'*Ma foi!*' cried Count Boyer at last, I suppose we may go home again. Not ours the fault if our duty has not been offered with sufficient respect.'

'My master,' said the Spanish envoy haughtily, 'will probably think my patience but little deserving of his praise.'

‘And I,’ said a German baron, all covered with decorations, ‘have brought this letter of gratulation from the Margrave of Baden, and, for aught I see, am like to carry it back to his Serene Highness.’

‘As for me,’ said Count Bjosterna, the Swedish minister, ‘I serve a master who never brooked an insult; and lest this should become such, I ‘ll take my leave.’

‘Not so, messieurs,’ cried O’Sullivan, stepping forward, and placing himself in front of the door. ‘You have come here to pay my master, the king of England, certain marks of your respect. It is for him to choose the time he will accept of them. By heaven! not a man of you shall leave this till his good pleasure in that matter be known.’

‘Well said, O’Sullivan!’ said General Upton, grasping the old man’s hand; while MacNiel and some other chieftains pushed forward and ranged themselves before the door in solemn silence.

‘Nay, nay, gentlemen,’ interposed the cardinal-secretary, Gualtieri – a man whose venerable appearance commanded universal respect; ‘this would be most unseemly on every hand. We are all here animated by one feeling of sincere deference and attachment to a great prince. There may be good and sufficient reasons why he has not received our homage. It would ill become us to inquire into these. Not enough for us that our intentions are those of respectful duty; we must mark, by our conduct, that we appreciate the rank of him to whom we offer them.‘To these words, uttered aloud, he added something in a whisper to the principal persons at either side; and, seeming to yield to his instances, they fell back, while O’Sullivan, bowing respectfully to the cardinal, in token of acquiescence, moved slowly away, followed by the chieftains.

This little incident, as may be supposed, contributed nothing to remove the constraint of the scene; and an almost unbroken stillness now prevailed, when at length a carriage was seen to drive from the courtyard.

‘There goes Monsignore Alberti,’ said Count Boyer. ‘Where the secretary of the Pope gives the initiative, it is surely safe to follow. My duty is paid.’ And so saying, and with a deep obeisance to all at either side of him, he passed out. The Spanish minister followed; and now the whole assemblage gradually moved away, so that in less than an hour the salons were deserted, and none remained of all that crowded mass which so late had filled them, except O’Sullivan, MacNiel, and a few Highland chieftains of lesser note.

‘One might be tempted to say that there was a curse upon this cause,’ said MacNiel sternly, as he threw himself down into a seat. Who ever saw a morning break with brighter hopes; and see already, scarcely an hour past the noon, and they are all gone – wafted to the winds.’

‘No, no, MacNiel,’ said O’Sullivan gravely; ‘you are wrong, believe me. These butterflies knew well that it was only a gleam of sunshine, not a summer. The hopes of the Stuarts are gone for ever.’

‘Why are you here, then, if you think so?’ cried the other impetuously.

‘For that very reason, sir. I feel, as you and all these gentlemen here do, that fidelity is a contract made for life.’

‘They were the luckiest that closed that account first,’ muttered one of the lairds, half aloud. ‘By my saul, Culloden wasn’t colder lying than the Campagna.’

‘Come along, we may as well follow the rest,’ said MacNiel, rising. ‘Will you dine with us, O’Sullivan? Mac-Allister and Brane are coming.’

‘No, MacNiel. I have made this anniversary a day of fasting for many a year back. I took a vow never to taste meat or wine on this festival, till I should do so beneath the king’s roof, in his own land.’

‘Ye ‘re like to keep a black Lent o’ it, then,’ muttered the old laird, with a dry laugh, and shuffled along after his chieftain, as he led the way toward the door.

O’Sullivan waited till they had gone; and then, with a sad glance around him, as if like a leave-taking, left the palace and turned homeward.

CHAPTER III. THE ALTIERI PALACE

In a large and splendid chamber, whose only light was a small lamp within a globe of alabaster, Charles Edward lay, full-dressed, upon his bed. His eyes were closed, but his features did not betoken sleep: on the contrary, his flushed cheek told of intemperance, and the table, covered with wine-decanters and glasses, beside him, confirmed the impression. His breathing was thick and laboured, and occasionally broken by a dry, short cough. There was, indeed, little to remind one of the handsome chevalier in the bloated face, the heavy, hanging jaws, and the ungainly figure of him who, looking far older than his real age, now lay there. Though dressed with peculiar care, and covered with the insignia of several orders, his embroidered vest was unbuttoned, and showed the rich lace of his jabot, stained and discoloured by wine. A splendidly ornamented sword lay beside him, on which one hand rested, the fingers tremulously touching the richly embossed hilt. Near the foot of the bed, on a low, well-cushioned chair, sat another figure, whose easy air of jocularity and good-humoured, sensual countenance presented a strong contrast to the careworn expression of the Prince's face. Dressed in a long loose robe of white cloth, which he wore not ungracefully, his well-rounded legs crossed negligently in front of him, and his hands clasped with an air of quiet and happy composure, the man was a perfect picture of a jolly friar, well-to-do and contented. This was George Kelly, the very type of happy, self-satisfied sensuality. If a phrenologist would have augured favourably from the noble development of forehead and temples, the massive back-head and widely spreading occiput would have quickly shown that nature had alloyed every good gift with a counterpoise of low tastes and bad passions, more than enough to destroy the balance of character.

'Who 's there? Who 's in waiting?' muttered the Prince, half aloud, as if suddenly arousing himself.

'Kelly – only Kelly,' answered the friar. 'Then the wine is not finished, George, eh? that's certain; the decanters are not empty. What hour is it?' 'As well as I can see, it wants a few minutes of five.'

'Of five! of five! Night or morning, which?'

'Five in the evening. I believe one might venture to call it night, for they're lighting the lamps in the streets already.'

'What's this here for, George,' said the Prince, lifting up the sword. 'We're not going to Bannockburn, are we? Egad! if we be, I trust they 'll give me a better weapon. What nonsense of yours is all this?'

'Don't you remember it was your Majesty's birthday, and that you dressed to receive the ministers?'

'To be sure I do; and we did receive them, George, didn't we? Have I not been drinking loyal toasts to every monarchy of Europe, and wishing well to those who need it not? Fifty-one, or fifty-two, which are we, George?'

'Faith, I forget,' said Kelly carelessly; 'but, like this Burgundy, quite old enough to be better.'

'The reproach comes well from *you*, you old reprobate! Whose counsels have made me what I am? Bolingbroke warned me against you many a long year back. Atterbury knew you too, and told me what you were. By Heaven!' cried he, with a wilder energy, 'it was that very spirit of dictation, that habit of prescribing to me whom to know, where to lean, what to say, and what to leave unsaid, has made me so rash and headstrong through life. A fellow of your caste had otherwise obtained no hold upon me; a lowbred, illiterate drunkard – '

A hearty burst of laughter from Kelly here stopped the speaker, who seemed actually overwhelmed by the cool insolence of the friar.

'Leave me, sir; leave the room!' cried Charles Edward haughtily. 'Let Lord Nairn – no, not him; let Murray of Blair, or Kinloch, attend me.'

Kelly never stirred nor uttered a word, but sat calm and motionless, while Charles, breathing heavily from his recent outburst of passion, lay back, half-exhausted, on the bed. After a few minutes he stretched out his hand and caught his wine-glass; it was empty, and Kelly filled it.

'I say, George,' cried he, after a pause, 'it must be growing late. Shall we not have these people coming to our levee soon?'

'They 've come and gone, sire, six hours ago. I would not permit your Majesty to be disturbed for such a pack of falsehearted sycophants; the more that they sent such insolent messages, demanding as a right to be received, and asking how long they were to wait your royal pleasure.'

'Did they so, George? Is this true?'

'True as Gospel. That Spaniard, with the red-brown beard, came even to your Majesty's antechamber, and spoke so loud I thought he'd have awoke you'; nor was Count Boyor much better-mannered – '

'Come and gone!' broke in Charles. 'What falsehoods will grow out of this! You should have told me, Kelly. Health, ease, happiness – I 'd have sacrificed all to duty. Ay, George, kings have duties like other men. Were there many here?'

'I never saw one-half the number. The carriages filled the Corso to the Piazza del Popolo. There was not a minister absent.'

'And of our own people?'

'They were all here. O'Sullivan, Barra, Clangavin – '

'Where was Tullybardine? – Ah! I forgot,' broke in Charles, with a deep sigh. '"Here's to them that are gone," George, as the old song says. Did they seem dissatisfied at my absence? – how did you explain it?'

'I said your Majesty was indisposed; that State affairs had occupied you all the preceding night, and that you had at last fallen into a slumber.'

'Was Glengariff among them?'

'You forget, sire. We buried him six weeks ago.'

'To be sure we did. Show me that glass, George – no, the looking-glass, man – and light those tapers yonder.'

Kelly obeyed, but with an evident reluctance, occupying time, so as to withdraw the other's attention from his project. This stratagem did not succeed, and Charles waited patiently till his orders were fulfilled, when, taking the mirror in his hand, he stared long and steadfastly at the reflection of his features. It was several minutes before he spoke, and when he did, the voice was tremulous and full of deep feeling.

'George, I am sadly changed; there is but little of the handsome Chevalier here. I didn't think to look like this these fifteen years to come.'

'Faith! for one who has gone through all that you have, I see no such signs of wear and tear,' said Kelly. 'Had you been a Pope or a Cardinal – had you lived like an Elector of Hanover, with no other perils than a bare head in a procession, or the gouty twinges of forty years' "sauer kraut – "'

'Keep your coarse ribaldry for your equals, sirrah. Let there be some, at least, above the mark of your foul slander,' cried Charles angrily; and then, throwing the looking-glass from him, he fell back upon his bed like one utterly exhausted. Kelly (who knew him too well to continue an irritating topic, his habit being to leave quietly alone the spirit that forgot more rapidly than it resented) sipped his wine in silence for some minutes. 'This day, sixteen years ago, I breakfasted in Carlisle, at the house of a certain Widow Branards. It's strange how I remember a name I have never heard since,' said Charles, in a voice totally altered from its late tone of excitement. 'Do you know, Kelly, that it was on the turn of a straw the fate of England hung that morning? Keppoch had cut his hand with the hilt of his claymore, and instead of counselling – as he ever did – a forward movement, he joined those who advised retreat. Had we gone on, George, the game was our own. There is now no doubt on the matter.'

'I have always heard the same,' said Kelly; 'and that your Majesty yielded with a profound conviction that the counsel was ruinous. Is it true, sire, that O'Sullivan agreed with your Majesty?'

'Quite true, George; and the poor fellow shed tears – perhaps for the only time in his life – when he heard that the decision was given against us. Stuart of Appin and Kerr were of the same mind; but *Dits aliter visum*, George. We turned our back on Fortune that morning, and she never showed us her face after.'

'You are not forgetting Falkirk, surely?' said Kelly, who never lost an opportunity of any flattering allusion to the Prince's campaigns.

'Falkirk was but half what it ought to have been. The chieftains got to quarrel among themselves, and left Hawley to pursue his retreat unmolested; as the old song says,

'"The turnkey spat in the jailer's face,
While the prisoner ran away!"

And now they are all gone, George – gone where you and I must meet them some day – not a far-off one, maybe.'

'O'Sullivan was here to-day, sire, to wish your Majesty long life and happiness; and the old fellow looked as hearty and high-spirited as ever. I saw him as he passed out of the courtyard, and you 'd have guessed, by his air and step, that he was a man of forty.'

'He's nigh to eighty-five, then, or I mistake me.' 'Life's strong in an Irishman – there's no doubt of it,' cried Kelly enthusiastically; 'there's no man takes more out of prosperity, nor gives way less to bad fortune.' 'What's that song of yours, George, about Paddy O'Flynn – isn't that the name?' said the Prince, laughing. 'Let 's have it, man.'

'You mean Terry O'Flynn, sire,' said Kelly; 'and, faith, 'twould puzzle me to call to mind one verse of the same song.'

'Do you even remember the night you made it, George, in the little wayside shrine, eight miles from Avignon? I'll never forget the astonished faces of the two friars that peeped in and saw you, glass in hand, before the fire, chanting that pleasant melody.'

'The Lord forgive you! 'tis many a bad thing you led me into,' said Kelly with affected sorrow, as he arose and walked to the window. Meanwhile the Prince, in a low kind of murmuring voice, tried to recall some words of the song. 'Talking of friars,' said Kelly, 'there's a thumping big one outside, with his great face shining like the dial of a clock. I 'm much mistaken if he's not a countryman of my own!'

'Can he sing, George? Has he the gift of minstrelsy, man?'

'If your Royal Highness would like to hear the canticles, I'm sure he'd oblige you. Faith, I was right; it's poor Luke MacManus – a simple, kind-hearted creature as ever lived. I remember now that he asked me when it was possible to see your Royal Highness; and I told him that he must put down into writing whatever he wanted to say, and come here with it on the 20th; and sure enough, there he is now.'

'And why did you tell him any such thing, sir?' said the Prince angrily. 'What are these petitions but demands for aid that we have not to bestow – entreaties we cannot satisfy? Are we not pensioners ourselves? ay, by the Lord Harry, are we, and beggarly enough in our treatment too. None knows this better than yourself, Master Kelly. It is not ten days since you pawned my George. Ay, and, by the way, you never brought me the money. What do you say to that?'

'I received twenty-four thousand francs, sire,' said Kelly calmly; 'eighteen of which I paid, by your Royal Highness's order, to the Countess.'

'I never gave such an order – where is it?'

'Spoken, sire, in the words of a prince; and heard by one who never betrayed him,' said the friar quickly – 'the Countess herself – '

'No more of this, sir. We are not before a court of justice. And now let me tell you, Kelly, that the town is full of the malversation of this household; and that however proverbial Irish economy and good management be in its own country, climate and change of air would seem to have impaired its excellence. My brother tells me that our waste and extravagance are public town talk.'

'So much the better, sire – so much the better!'

'What do you mean by that, sirrah?' cried the Prince angrily.

'Your Royal Highness has heard of Alcibiades, and why he cut the tail off his dog! Well, isn't it a comfort to think that they never say worse of us here than that we spend freely what's given grudgingly; and that the penury of others never contaminated the spirit of your Royal Highness?'

'Have a care, sir,' said the Prince, with more dignity than he had shown before: 'there will come a day, perhaps, when we may grow weary of this buffoonery.'

'I'm sorry for it, then,' replied Kelly unabashed; 'for when it does, your Royal Highness will just be as little pleased with wisdom.'

It was thus alternately flattering and outraging Charles Edward – now insinuating the existence of qualities that he had not; – now disparaging gifts which he really possessed – that this man maintained an influence which others in vain tried to obtain over the Prince. It was a relief, too, to find one whose pliancy suited all his humours, and whose character had none of that high-souled independence which animated his Scottish followers. Lastly, Kelly never asked favours for himself or for others. Enough for him the privilege of the intimacy he enjoyed. He neither sought nor cared for more. Perhaps, of all his traits, none weighed more heavily in his favour than this one. It was, then, in a kind of acknowledgment of this single-mindedness that the Prince, after a pause, said:

'Let your countryman come up here, George. I see he 's the only courtier that remains to us.'

Kelly rose without a word, and left the room to obey the command.

Little as those in waiting on the Prince were ever disposed to resist Kelly in any proceeding, they were carried very nearly to insubordination, as they saw him conducting through the long line of salons the humbly-clad, barefooted friar, who, with his arms reverently crossed on his breast, threw stealthy glances, as he passed, at the unwonted splendour around him.

'I hope, sir,' said Fra Luke respectfully, 'that your kindness to a poor countryman won't harm yourself; but if ever you were to run the risk, 'tis an occasion like this might excuse it.'

'What do you mean?' said Kelly hastily, and staring him full in the face.

'Why, that the petition I hold here is about one that has the best blood of Ireland in his veins; but maybe, for all that, if you knew what was in it, you mightn't like to give it.'

Kelly paused for a few seconds, and then, as if having formed his resolution, said:

'If that be the case, Luke, it is better that I should not see it. There's no knowing when my favour here may come to an end. There's not a morning breaks, nor an evening closes, that I don't expect to hear I'm discarded, thrown off, abandoned. Maybe it would bring me luck if I was to do one, just *one*, good action, by way of a change, before I go.'

'I hope you've done many such afore now,' said Luke piously.

Kelly did not reply, but a sudden change in his features told how acutely the words sank into his heart.

'Wait for me here a minute,' said he; and motioning to Luke to be seated, he passed noiselessly into the chamber of the Prince.

CHAPTER IV. THE PRINCE'S CHAMBER

Brief as Kelly's absence had been, it was enough to have obliterated from the Prince's mind all the reasons for his going. No sooner was he alone than he drank away, muttering to himself, as he filled his glass, snatches of old Jacobite songs – words of hope and encouragement; or at times, with sad and broken utterance, phrases of the very deepest despondency.

It was in this half-dreamy state that Kelly found him as he entered. Scotland – Rome – the court of France – the château at St. Germains – the shelling where he sought refuge in Skye – the deck of the French privateer that landed him at Brest – were, by turns, the scenes of his imagination; and it was easy to mark how, through all the windings of his fancy, an overweening sense of his own adventurous character upheld and sustained him. If he called up at times traits of generous devotion and loyalty – glorious instances wherein his followers rose to the height of heroes – by some artful self-complacency he was ever sure to ascribe these to the great cause they fought for; or, oftener still, to his own commanding influence and the fascination of his presence. In the midst of all, however, would break forth some traits that bespoke a nobler nature. In one of these was it that he alluded to the proposition of Cardinal Tencin, to make the cession of Ireland the price of the French adhesion to his cause. 'No, no, Monsieur le Cardinal,' cried he several times energetically; '*tout ou rien! tout ou rien!*… Must not my cause have been a poor one, when he dared to make me such an offer? Ay, Kelly, and I swear to you he did so!'

These last words were the first that showed a consciousness of the other's presence.

'The Dutchman was better than that, George, eh? – a partition of the kingdom! – never, never. Ireland, too! The very men who stood truest to me – the very men who never counselled retreat. Think of Lovatt, George. If you had but seen him that day! He could not bide the time I took to eat a morsel of breakfast, so eager was he to be rid of me. I laughed outright at his impatience, and said that he remembered but the worst half of the old Highland adage which tells you "to speed the parting guest." He never offered me a change of linen, George, and I had worn the same clothes from the day before Culloden. "Wae's me for Prince Charlie!"'

'It's a proud thing for me to hear how you speak of my countrymen, sire,' said Kelly.

'Glorious fellows they were, every man of them!' cried the Prince with enthusiasm. 'Light-hearted and buoyant, when all others looked sad and downcast; always counselling the bold course, and readier to do than say it! I never met – if I ever heard of – but one Irishman who was not a man of honour. *He* was enough, perhaps, to leaven a whole nation – a low, mean sycophant, cowardly, false, and foul-tongued; a fellow to belie you and betray you – to track you into evil that others might stare at you there. I never thought ill of mankind till I knew him. Do you know whom I mean – eh, George?'

'Faith, if the portrait be not intended for myself, I am at a loss to guess,' said Kelly good-humouredly.

'So it is, you arch-scoundrel; and, shameless though you be, does it never occur to you how you will go down to posterity? The corrupter of a Prince; the fellow who debauched and degraded him!'

'Isn't it something that posterity will ever hear of me at all?' said Kelly. 'Is it not fame, at any rate? If there should be any records of our life together, who knows but a clever commentator will find out that but for me and my influence the Prince of Wales would have been a downright beast? – "that Kelly humanised your Royal Highness, kept you from all the contamination of cardinals and scheming Monsignori, rallied your low spirits, comforted your dark hours, and enjoyed your bright ones."'

'For what – for what? what was his price?' cried Charles eagerly.

'Because he felt in his heart that, sooner or later, you 'd be back, King of England and Ireland, and George Kelly wouldn't be forgotten. No, faith; Archbishop of Westminster; and devil a less I'd be – that's the price, if you wish to hear it!'

The Prince laughed heartily, as he ever did when the friar gave way to his impertinent humour, and then, sitting up in his bed, told Kelly to order coffee. To his last hour, coffee seemed to exercise the most powerful effect on him, clearing his faculties after hours of debauch, and enabling him to apply himself to business when he appeared to be utterly exhausted. Kelly, who well knew how to adapt himself to each passing shade of temperament, followed the Prince into a small dressing-room in silence, and remained standing at a short distance behind his chair.

'Tell Conway,' said he, pointing to a mass of papers on the table, 'that these must wait. I 'll go down to Albano tomorrow or next day for a change of air. I 'll not hear of anything till I return. Cardinal Altieri knows better than I do what Sir Horace Mann writes home to England. This court is in perfect understanding with St. James's. As to the Countess, Kelly, let it not be spoken of again; you hear me? What paper is that in your hand?'

'A petition, I believe, sire; at least, the quarter it comes from would so bespeak it.'

'Throw it on the fire, then. Is it not enough to live thus, but that I must be reminded thirty, forty times a day of my poverty and incapacity? Am I to be flouted with my fallen fortune? On the fire with it, at once!'

'Poor Luke's prayers were offered at an untimely moment,' said Kelly, untying the scroll, as if preparing to obey. 'Maybe, after all, he is asking for a new rosary, or a pair of sandals. Shall I read it, sire?'

The Prince made no reply, and Kelly, who thoroughly understood his humour, made no further effort to obtain a hearing for his friend; but, tearing the long scroll in two, he muttered the first line that caught his eye:

'"Petition of Mary Fitzgerald."'

'What – of – whom? Fitzgerald! what Fitzgerald?' cried Charles, catching the other's wrist with a sudden grasp.

'"Sister of Grace Géraldine."'

The words were not well uttered when Charles snatched the paper from Kelly's hand, and drew near to the lamp.

'Leave me; wait in the room without, Kelly!' said he; and the tone of his voice implied a command not to be gainsaid. The Prince now flattened out the crumpled document before him, holding the fragments close together; but, although he bent over them attentively for several minutes, he made little progress in their contents, for drop by drop the hot tears rose to his eyes, and fell heavily on the paper. Gradually, too, his head declined, till at last it fell forward on the table, where he lay, sobbing deeply. It was a long time before he arose from this attitude; and then his furrowed cheeks and glazed eyes told of intense sorrow. 'What ruin have I brought everywhere!' was the exclamation that broke from him, in a voice tremulous with agony. 'Kinloch said truly: "We must have sinned heavily, to be so heavily cursed!"' Again and again did he bend over the paper, and, few as were the lines, it was long before he could read them through, such was the gush of emotion they excited. 'Was there ever a cause so hallowed by misfortune?' cried he, in an accent of anguish. 'Oh! Grace, had you been spared to me, I might have been other than this. But, if it were to be – if it were indeed fated that I should become the thing I am, thank God you have not lived to see it! George,' cried he suddenly, 'who brought this paper?'

Kelly came at once at his call, and replied that the bearer was a poor friar, by name MacManus.

'Let me see him alone,' said the Prince; and the next moment Fra Luke entered the chamber, and, with a low and deferential gesture, stooped down to kiss his hand. 'You are an Irishman.' said Charles, speaking with a thick but rapid utterance; 'from none of your countrymen have I met with anything but loyalty and affection. Tell me, then, frankly, what you know of this paper – who wrote it?'

'I did, myself, your Royal Highness,' said Luke, trembling all over with fear.

'Its contents are all true – strictly true?'

'As the words of this holy Book.' said Luke, placing his hand on his breviary.

'Why were they not made known to me before – answer me that?' cried Charles angrily.

'I'll tell your Royal Highness why,' replied Luke, who gained courage as he was put upon the defensive. 'She that 's gone – the Heavens be her bed! – made her sister promise, in her last hour, never to ask nor look for favour or benefit from your Royal Highness.'

'I will not believe this,' broke in Charles indignantly; 'you are more than bold, sir, to dare to tell me so.'

"Tis true as Gospel,' replied the friar. 'Her words were: "Let there be one that went down to the grave with the thought that loving him was its best reward! and leave me to think that I live in his memory as I used in his heart.'"

The Prince turned away, and drew his hand across his eyes.

'How came she here – since when?' asked he suddenly.

'Four years back; we came together. I bore her company all the way from Ireland, and on foot too, just to put the child into the college here.'

'And she has been in poverty all this while?'

'Poverty! faith, you might call it distress! – keeping a little trattoria in the Viccolo d'Orso, taking sewing, washing – whatever she could; slaving and starving, just to get shoes and the like for the boy.'

'How comes it, then, that she has yielded at last to write me this?' said Charles, who, in proportion as his self-accusings grew more poignant, sought to turn reproach on any other quarter.

'She didn't, nor wouldn't,' said the Fra; "twas I did it myself. I told her that she might ease her conscience, by never accepting anything; that I'd write the petition and go up with it, and that all I 'd ask was a trifle for the child.'

'She loves him, then,' said Charles tenderly. The friar nodded his head slowly twice, and muttered, 'God knows she does.'

'And does he repay her affection?'

'How can he? Sure he doesn't know her; he never sees her. When we were on the way here, he always thought it was his nurse she was; and from that hour to this he never set eyes on her.'

'What motive was there for all this?'

'Just to save him the shame among the rest, that they couldn't say his mother's sister was in rags and wretchedness, without a meal to eat.'

'She never sees him, then?'

'Only when he walks out with the class, every Friday; they come down the hill from the Capitol, and then she's there, watching to get a look at him.'

'And he – what is he like?'

The friar stepped back, and gazed at the Prince from head to foot in silence, and then at length said: 'He's like a Prince, sorrow less! The black serge gown, the coarse shoes, the square cap, ugly as they are, can't disfigure him; and though they cut off his beautiful hair, that curled half-way down his back, they couldn't spoil him. He has the great dark blue eyes of his mother, and the long lashes, almost girlish to look at.'

'He's mild and gentle, then?' said Charles pensively.

'Indeed and I won't tell you a lie,' said Luke, half mournfully, 'but that 's just what I believe he isn't. The sub-rector says there's nothing he couldn't learn, either in the sciences or the humanities. He can write some of the ancient and three of the modern tongues. His disputations got him the medal; but somehow – '

'Well – go on. Somehow – '

'He's wild – wild,' said the friar, and as if he was glad to have found the exact word he wanted; 'he 'd rather go out on the Campagna there and ride one of the driver's ponies all day, than he 'd walk in full procession with all the cardinals. He 'd like to be fighting the shepherds' dogs, wicked as they are, or goading their mad cattle till they turn on him. Many a day they 've caught him at that sport; and, if I 'm not mistaken, he's in punishment now, though Mrs. Mary doesn't know it, for putting

a ram inside the railings of a fountain, so that the neighbours durstn't go near to draw water. 'Tis diversions like these has made him as ragged and tattered as he is.'

'Bad stuff for the cloister,' said Charles, with a faint smile.

'Who knows? Sure Cardinal Guidotti was at every mischief when a boy; and there's Gardoni, the secretary of the Quirinal, wasn't he the terror of the city with his pranks?'

'Can I see this boy – I mean, could he be brought here without his knowing or suspecting to whom he was presented?'

'Sure, if Kelly was to – '

'Ay, ay, I know as well as you do.' broke in the Prince, 'George Kelly has craft and cunning enough for more than that; but supposing, my worthy Fra, that I did not care to intrust Kelly with this office: supposing that, for reasons known to myself, I wished this matter a secret, can you hit upon the means of bringing the lad here, that I might see and speak with him?'

'It should be after dark, your Royal Highness, or he would know the palace again, and then find out who lived in it.'

'Well, be it so.'

'Then there's the rules of the college; without a special leave a student cannot leave the house, and even then he must have a professor with him.'

'A cardinal's order would, of course, be sufficient,' said the Prince.

'To be sure it would, sir,' said the friar, with a gesture that showed how implicitly his confidence was given to such a conjuncture.

'The matter shall be done then, and thus: on Tuesday next Kelly goes to Albano, and will not return till Wednesday or Thursday evening. At seven o'clock on Tuesday evening you will present yourself at the college, and ask for the president: you will only have to say that you are come for the youth Fitzgerald. He will be at once given into your charge; drive then at once to the Corso, where you can leave the carriage, and proceed hither on foot. When you arrive here, you shall be admitted at once. One only caution I have to give you, friar, and it is this: upon your reserve and discretion it depends whether I ever befriend this boy, or cast him off for ever. Should one syllable of this interview transpire – should I ever discover that, under any pretence or from any accident, you have divulged what has passed between us here – and discover it I must, if it be so – from that instant I cease to take interest in him. I know your cloth well; you can be secret if you will: let this be an occasion for the virtue. I need not tell you more; nor will I add one threat to enforce my caution. The boy's own fortune in life is on the issue; that will be enough.'

'Is Mrs. Mary to be intrusted with the secret?' said the Fra timidly.

'No; not now at least.' The Prince sat down, and leaned his forehead on his hand in thought. At length he said: 'The boy will ask you, in all likelihood, whither you are leading him. You must say that a countryman of his own, a man of some influence, and who knew his friends, desires to see and speak with him. That he is one with whom he may be frank and open-hearted; free to tell whatever he feels; whether he likes his present life or seeks to change it. He is to address me as the Count, and be careful yourself to give me no higher title. I believe I have said all.'

'If Kelly asks me what was my business with your Royal Highness?'

'Ay; well thought of. Say it was a matter of charity; and take these few crowns, that you may show him as you pass out.'

'Well, did you succeed?' asked Kelly, as the poor friar, flushed and excited from the emotion of his interview, entered the antechamber.

'I did indeed; and may the saints in heaven stand to *you* for the same! It 's a good work you done, and you 'll have your reward!'

'Egad,' cried Kelly, in a tone of levity, 'if I had any friends among the saints, I must have tried their patience pretty hard these last eight or nine years; but who is this Mary Fitzgerald – I just caught the name on the paper?'

'She's – she's – she's – a countrywoman of our own,' stammered out Fra Luke, while he moved uneasily from foot to foot, and fumbled with his hands up the sleeves of his robe.

'It was lucky for you, then, we were just talking about Ireland before you went in. He was saying how true and staunch the Irish always showed themselves.'

'And does he talk of them times?' asked the Fra in astonishment.

'Ay, by the hour. Sometimes it's breaking day before I go to bed, he telling me about all his escapes and adventures. I could fill a book with stories of his.'

'Musha! but I'd like to hear them,' cried Luke with honest enthusiasm.

'Come up here, then – let me see what evening – it mustn't be Tuesday – nor Wednesday – maybe, indeed, I won't be back before Friday. Oh, there's the bell now; that's for *me,*' cried he; and before he could fix the time he hurried off to the Prince's chamber.

CHAPTER V. AFTER DARK

It was a long and weary day to the poor friar, watching for that Tuesday evening when he should appear at the gate of the Jesuits' College and ask for the young Fitzgerald. He felt, too, as though some amount of responsibility had been imposed on him to which he was unequal. It seemed to his simple intelligence as if it were a case that required skill and dexterity. The rector might possibly ask this, or wish to know that; and then, how was he to respect the secrecy he had pledged to the Prince? or was he to dare to deceive the great president of the college? Supposing, too, all these difficulties over, what of the youth himself? How should he answer the inquiries he was certain to make – whither he was going – with what object – and to whom? Greater than all these personal cares was his anxiety that the boy should please his Royal Highness; that the impression he made should be favourable; that his look and bearing might interest the Prince and ensure his future advancement. Let us own that Fra Luke had his grave misgivings on this score. From all he could pick up through the servitors of the convent, Gerald was a wild, headstrong youth, constantly 'in punishment,' and regarded by the superiors as the great instigator of every infraction to the discipline of the college. 'What will a prince think of such an unruly subject?' was the sad question the simple-hearted friar ever posed to himself. 'And if the rector only send a report of him, he'll have no chance at all.' With this sorrowful thought he brought his reflections to a close; and, taking out his beads, set himself vigorously to implore the intercession of the saints in a cause intrusted to hands so weak and unskilful as his own.

The grim old gate of the college, flanked with its two low towers, looked gloomy enough as the evening closed in. The little aperture, too, through which questions were asked or answered, was now shut up for the night, and all intercourse with the world without suspended. The Fra had yet a full hour to wait, and he was fain to walk briskly to and fro, to warm his blood, chilled by the cold wind that came over the Campagna. For a while the twinkling of a stray light, high up in the building, set him a-thinking where the cell of the boy might be; gradually these lights disappeared, and all was wrapped in gloom and darkness, when suddenly the chapel became illuminated, and the rich, full swell of an organ toned out its solemn sounds on the still night. The brief prelude over, there followed one of those glorious old chants of the church which combine a strain of intense devotion with a highly exalted poetic feeling. In a perfect flood of harmony the sounds blended, until the very air seemed to hold them suspended. They ceased; and then, like the softest melody of a flute, a young voice arose alone, and, soaring upward, uttered a passage of seraphic sweetness. It was as though the song of some angelic spirit, telling of hope and peace; and, as a long, thrilling shake concluded the strain, the loud thunder of the organ and the full swell of the choir closed the service. The moment after, all was silent and in darkness.

Bell after bell, from the great city beneath, tolled out seven o'clock; and Fra Luke knocked modestly at the gate of the college. His visit appeared to have been expected, for he was admitted at once and conducted to the large hall, which formed the waiting-room of the college. The friar had not long to wait; for scarcely had he taken his seat when the door opened, and young Fitzgerald appeared. Advancing with an easy air, and a degree of gracefulness that contrasted strangely with his poverty-struck dress, the boy said, 'I am told you wish to speak to me, father.'

'Are you Gerald Fitzgerald, my son?' asked Fra Luke softly.

'Yes; that's my name.'

The Fra looked at the beaming face and the bright blue eyes, soft in their expression as a girl's, and the dimpled cheek, over which a slight flush was mantling, and wondered to himself could this be the wild, reckless youth they called him? – had they not been calumniating that fine and simple nature? So deeply was the Fra impressed with this sentiment that he forgot to continue the interrogatory, and stood gazing with admiration on him.

'Well, said the boy, smiling good-humouredly, 'what is your business with me, for it is nigh bed-time, and I must be going?'

'It was *your* voice I heard in the solo a few minutes ago,' cried the Fra eagerly; 'I know it was. It was *you* who sang the

'Virgo virginum præclara, Mihi jam non sis amara?'

'Yes, yes,' said the youth, reddening. 'But what of that? You never came here to-night to ask me this question.'

'True enough,' said the Fra, sighing painfully – less, indeed at the rebuke than the hot-tempered tone of the boy as he spoke it. 'I came here to-night to fetch you along with me, to see one who was a friend of your family long, long ago; he has heard of you here, and wishes to see and speak with you. He is a person of great rank and high station, so that you will show him every deference, and demean yourself toward him respectfully and modestly; for he means you well, Gerald; he will befriend you.'

'But what need have I of his friendship or his good offices?' said the youth, growing deadly pale as he spoke. 'Look at this serge gown – see this cap – they can tell you what I am destined for. I shall be a priest one of these days, Fra; and what has a priest to do with ties of affection or friendship?'

'Oh! for the blessed Joseph's sake,' whispered the Fra, 'be careful what you say. These are terrible words to speak – and to speak them here, too,' added he, as he threw his eyes over the walls of the room.

'Is this man a cardinal?'

'No,' said the Fra; 'he is a layman, and a count.'

'Better that; had he been a cardinal, I 'd not have gone. Whenever the old cardinal, Caraffa, comes here, I'm sure to have a week's punishment; and I hate the whole red-stockinged race – '

'There, there – let us away at once,' whispered the Fra. 'Such discourse as this will bring misfortune upon us both.'

'Have you the superior's permission for my going out with you?' asked Gerald.

'Yes; I have his leave till eleven o'clock – we shall be back here before that time.'

'I'm sorry for it,' said the boy sternly. 'I'd like to think I was crossing that old courtyard there for the last time.'

'You will be cold, my poor boy,' said the friar, 'with no other covering but that light frock; but we shall find a carriage as we go along.'

'No, no, no,' cried the boy eagerly. 'Let us walk, Fra; let us walk, and see everything. It's like one of the old fairy tales nurse used to tell me long ago – to see the city all alight thus, and the troops of people moving on, and all these bright shops with the rich wares so temptingly displayed. Ah! how happy must they be who can wander at will among all these – exchanging words and greetings, and making brotherhood with their fellows! See, Fra – see!' cried he, 'what is it comes yonder, with all the torches, and the men in white?'

'It is some great man's funeral, my child. Let us say a *Pax eterna*,' and he fumbled for his beads as he spoke.

'Let us follow them,' said the boy; 'they are bearing the catafalque into that small church – how grand and solemn it all is!' and now, attaching himself to the long line of acolytes, the boy walked step for step with the procession, mingling his clear and liquid notes in the litany they were chanting. While he sang with all the force of intense expression, it was strange to mark how freely his gaze wandered over all the details of the scene – his keen eyes scrutinised everything – the costumes, the looks, the gestures of all; the half tawdry splendour below – the dim and solemn grandeur of the Gothic roof overhead. If there was nothing of levity, as little was there anything of reverence in his features. The sad scene, with all its trappings of woe, was a spectacle, and no more, to him; and, as he turned away to leave the spot, his face betrayed the desire he felt for some new object of interest. Nor had he long to search for such; for, just as they entered the Piazza di Spagna, they found a dense crowd gathered around a group of those humble musicians from Calabria – the Pifferari, they

call them – stunted in form, and miserably clad: these poor creatures, whose rude figures recall old pictures of the ancient Pan, have a wonderful attraction for the populace. They were singing some wild, rude air of their native mountains, accompanying the refrain with a sort of dance, while their uncouth gestures shook the crowd with laughter.

'Oh! I love these fellows, but I never have a chance of seeing them,' cried the boy; so bursting away, he dashed into the thick of the assembled throng. It was not without a heartfelt sense of shame that the poor friar found himself obliged to follow his charge, whom he now began to fear might be lost to him.

'Per Bacco! cried one of the crowd, 'here's a Frate can't resist the charms of profane melody, and is elbowing his way, like any sinner, among us.'

'It's the cachuca he wants to see,' exclaimed another; 'come, Marietta, here's a connoisseur worth showing your pretty ankles to.'

'By the holy rosary!' cried a third, 'she is determined on the conquest.'

This outburst was caused by the sudden appearance of a young girl, who, though scarcely more than a child, bore in her assured look and flashing eyes all the appearances of more advanced years. She was a deep brunette in complexion, to which the scarlet cloth that hung from her black hair gave additional brilliancy. Her jupe, of the same colour, recrossed and interlaced with tawdry gold tinsel, came only to the knee, below which appeared limbs that many a Roman statuary had modelled, so perfect were they in every detail of symmetry and beauty. Her whole air was redolent of that *beauté du diable*, as the French happily express it, which seems never to appeal in vain to the sympathies of the populace. It was girlhood, almost childlike girlhood, but dashed with a conscious effrontery that had braved many a libertine stare – many a look significant in coarseness.

With one wild spring she bounded into the open space, and there she stood now on tiptoe, her arms extended straight above her head, while with clasped hands she remained motionless, so that every line and lineament of her faultless figure might be surveyed in unbroken symmetry.

'Ah carina – che bellezza! come e graziosa!' broke from those who, corrupt, debased, and degraded in a hundred ways as they were, yet inherited that ancient love of symmetry in form which the games and the statues of antique Rome had fostered. With a graceful ease no ballarina of the grand opera could have surpassed, she glided into those slow and sliding movements which precede the dance – movements meant to display the graces of form, without the intervention of action. Gradually, however, the time of the music grew quicker, and now her heightened colour and more flashing eye bespoke how her mind lent itself to the measure. The dance was intended to represent the coy retirings of a rustic beauty from the advances of an imaginary lover; and, though she was alone, so perfectly did she convey the storied interest of the scene, that the enraptured audience could trace every sentiment of the action. At one moment her gestures depicted the proudest insolence and disdain; at the next a half-yielding tenderness – now, it was passion to the very verge of madness – now, it was a soul-subduing softness, that thrilled through every heart around her. Incapable, as it seemed, of longer resisting the solicitations of love, her wearied steps grew heavier, her languid head drooped, and a look of voluptuous waywardness appeared to steal over her. Wherever her eye turned a murmured sigh acknowledged how thoroughly the captivation held enthralled every bosom around, when suddenly, with a gesture that seemed like a cry – so full of piercing agony it seemed – she dashed her hands across her forehead and stared with aching eye-balls into vacancy, – it was jealousy: the terrible pang had shot through her heart, and she was wild. The horrible transitions from doubt to doubt, until full conviction forced itself upon her, were given with extraordinary power. Over her features, in turn, passed every expression of passion. The heartrending tenderness of love – the clinging to a lost affection – the straining effort to recall him who had deserted her – the black bitterness of despair – and then, with a wild spring, like the bound of a tiger, she counterfeited a leap over a precipice to death!

She fell upon the ground, and as the mingled sobs and cries rose through the troubled crowd, a boy tore his way through the dense mass, and fighting with all the energy of infuriated strength, gained the open space where she lay. Dropping on his knees, he bent over, and clasping her hand kissed it wildly over and over, crying out in a voice of broken agony, 'Oh! Marietta, Marietta mia, come back to us – come back, we will love you and cherish you.'

A great roar of laughter – the revulsion to that intensity of feeling so lately diffused among them – now shook the mob. Revenging, as it were, the illusion that had so enthralled themselves, they now turned all their ridicule upon the poor boy.

'Santissima Virginia! if he isn't a scholar of the Holy Order!' shouted one.

'Ecco! a real Jesuit!' said another; 'had he been a little older, though, he 'd have done it more secretly.'

'The little priest is offering the consolation of his order,' cried a third; and there rained upon him, from every side, words of mockery and sarcasm.

'Don't you see that he is a mere boy – have you no shame that you can mock a simple-hearted child like this?' said the burly Fra, as he pushed the crowd right and left, and forced a passage through the mob. 'Come along, Gerald, come along. They are a cowardly pack, and if they were not fifty to one, they 'd think twice ere they 'd insult us.' This speech he delivered in Italian, with a daring emphasis of look and gesture that made the craven listeners tremble. They opened a little path for the friar and his charge to retire; nor was it until they had nearly gained the corner of the Piazza that they dared to yell forth a cry of insult and derision.

The boy grasped the Fra's hand as he heard it, and looked up in his face with an expression there was no mistaking, so full was it of wild and daring courage.

'No, no, Gerald,' said he, 'there are too many of them, and what should we get by it after all? See, too, how they have torn your soutane all to pieces. I almost suspect we ought to go back again to the college, my boy. I scarcely like to present you in such a state as this.'

Well indeed might the Fra have come to this doubtful issue, for the youth's gown hung in ribbons around him, and his cap was flattened to his head.

'I wish I knew what was best to be done, Gerald,' said he, wiping the sweat from his brawny face. 'What do you advise yourself?'

'I'd say, go on,' cried the youth. 'Will a great signor think whether my poor and threadbare frock be torn or whole? – he 'll not know if I be in rags or in purple. Tell him, if you like, that we met with rough usage in the streets. Tell him, that in passing through the crowd they left me thus. Say nothing about Marietta, Fra; you need not speak of her.'

The boy's voice, as he uttered the last words, became little louder than a mere whisper.

'Come along then; and, with the help of the saints, we 'll go through with what we 've begun.'

And with this vigorous resolve the stout friar strode along down the Corso.

CHAPTER VI. THE INTERVIEW

It was full an hour after the time appointed when the friar, accompanied by young Gerald, entered the arched gate of the Altieri Palace.

'You have been asked for twice, Frate,' said the porter; 'and I doubt if you will be admitted now. It is the time his Royal Highness takes his siesta.'

'I must only hope for the best,' sighed out the Fra, as he ascended the wide stairs of white marble, with a sinking heart.

'Let us go a little slower, Fra Luke,' whispered the boy; 'I 'd like to have a look at these statues. See what a fine fellow that is strangling the serpent; and, oh! is she not beautiful, crouching in that large shell?'

'Heathen vanities, all of them,' muttered the Fra; 'what are they compared to the pure face of our blessed Lady?'

The youth felt rebuked, and was silent. While the friar, however, was communicating with the servant in waiting, the boy had time to stroll down the long gallery, admiring as he went the various works of art it contained. Stands of weapons, too, and spoils of the chase abounded, and these he examined with a wistful curiosity, reading from short inscriptions attached to the cases, which told him how this wolf had been killed by his Royal Highness on such a day of such a year, and how that boar had received his death-wound from the Prince's hand at such another time.

It almost required force from the friar to tear him away from objects so full of interest, nor did he succeed without a promise that he should see them all some other day. Passing through a long suite of rooms, magnificently furnished, but whose splendour was dimmed and faded by years, they reached an octagonal chamber of small but beautiful proportions; and here the friar was told the youth was to wait, while he himself was admitted to the Prince.

Charles Edward had just dined – and, as was his wont, dined freely – when the Fra was announced. 'You can retire,' said the Prince to the servants in waiting, but never turning his head toward where the friar was standing. The servants retreated noiselessly, and all was now still in the chamber. The Prince had drawn his chair toward the fire, and sat gazing at the burning logs in deep reverie. Apparently he followed his thoughts so far as to forget that the poor friar was yet in waiting; for it was only as a low, faint sigh escaped him that the Prince suddenly turning his head, cried out, 'Ah! our Frate. I had half forgotten you. You are somewhat late, are you not?'

In a voice tremulous with fear and deference Fra Luke narrated how they had been delayed by a misadventure in the Piazza, contriving to interweave in his story an apology for the torn dress and ragged habiliments the boy was to appear in. 'He is not in a state to be seen by your Royal Highness at all. If it wasn't that your Royal Highness will think little of the shell where the kernel is sound – '

'And who is to warrant me that, sir?' said the Prince angrily. 'Is it your guarantee I 'm to take for it?'

The poor friar almost felt as if he were about to faint at the stern speech, nor did he dare to utter a word of reply. So far, this was in his favour, since, when unprovoked by anything like rejoinder, Charles Edward was usually disposed to turn from any unpleasant theme, and address his thoughts elsewhere.

'I 'm half relenting, my good friar,' said he, in a calmer tone, 'that I should have brought you here on this errand. How am *I* to burden myself with the care of this boy? I am but a pensioner myself, weighed down already with a mass of followers. So long as hope remained to us we struggled on manfully enough. Present privation was to have had its recompense – at least we thought so.' He stopped suddenly, and then, as if ashamed of speaking thus confidentially to one he had seen only once before, his voice assumed a harsher, sterner accent as he said: 'These are not your concerns. What is it you propose I should do? Have you a plan? What is it?'

Had Fra Luke been required to project another scheme of invasion, he could not have been more dumbfounded and confused, and he stood the very picture of hopeless incapacity.

Charles Edward's temper was in that state when he invariably sought to turn upon others the reproaches his own conscience addressed to him, and he angrily said: 'It is by this same train of beggarly followers that my fortunes are rendered irretrievable. I am worried and harassed by their importunities; they attach the plague-spot of their poverty to me wherever I go. I should have freed myself from this thraldom many a year ago; and if I had, where and what might I not have been to-day? You, and others of your stamp, look upon me as an almoner, not more nor less.' His passion had now spent itself, and he sat moodily gazing at the fire.

'Is the lad here?' asked he, after a long pause.

'Yes, your Royal Highness,' said the friar, while he made a motion toward the door.

Charles Edward stopped him quickly as he said, 'No matter, there is not any need that I should see him. He and his aunt – she is his aunt, you said – must return to Ireland; this is no place for them. I will see Kelly about it to-morrow, and they shall have something to pay their journey. This arrangement does not please you, Frate, eh? Speak out, man. You think it cold, unnatural, and unkind – is it not so?'

'If your gracious Highness would just condescend to say a word to him – one word, that he might carry away in his heart for the rest of his days.'

'Better have no memory of me,' sighed the Prince drearily. 'Oh, don't say so, your Royal Highness; think what pride it will be to him yet, God knows in what far-away country, to remember that he saw you once, that he stood in your presence, and heard you speak to him.'

'It shall be as you wish, Frate; but I charge you once more to be sure that he may not know with whom he is speaking.'

'By this holy Book,' said the Fra, with a gesture implying a vow of secrecy.

'Go now; send him hither, and wait without till I send for you.'

The door had scarcely closed behind the friar when it opened again to admit the entrance of the youth. The Prince turned his head, and, whether it was the extreme poverty of the lad's appearance, more striking from the ragged and torn condition of his dress, or that something in Gerald's air and look impressed him painfully, he passed his hand across his eyes and averted his glance from him.

'Come forward, my boy,' said he at last. 'How are you called?'

'Gerald Fitzgerald, Signor Conte,' said he, firmly but respectfully.

'You are Irish by birth?' said the Prince, in a voice slightly tremulous.

'Yes, Signor Conte,' replied he, while he drew himself up with an air that almost savoured of haughtiness.

'And your friends have destined you for the priesthood, it seems.'

'I never knew I had friends,' said the boy; 'I thought myself a sort of castaway.'

'Why, you have just told me of your Irish blood – how knew you of that?'

'So long as I can remember I have heard that I was a Géraldine, and they call me Irish in the college.'

There was a frank boldness in his manner, totally removed from the slightest trace of rudeness or presumption, that already interested the Prince, who now gazed long and steadily on him.

'Do I remind you of any one you ever saw or cared for, Signor Conte?' asked the boy, with an accent of touching gentleness.

'That you do, child,' said he, laying his hand on the youth's shoulder, while he passed the other across his eyes.

'I hope it was of none who ever gave you sorrow,' said the boy, who saw the quivering motion of the lip that indicates deep grief.

Charles Edward now removed his hand, and turned away his head for some seconds.

At last he arose suddenly from his chair, and with an effort that seemed to show he was struggling for the mastery over his own emotions, said, 'Is it your own choice to be a priest, Gerald?'

'No; far from it. I 'd rather be a herd on the Campagna! You surely know little of the life of the convent, Signor Conte, or you had not asked me that question.'

Far from taking offence at the boy's boldness, the Prince smiled good-naturedly at the energy of his reply.

'Is it the stillness, the seclusion that you dislike?' asked he, evidently wanting the youth to speak of himself and of his temperament.

'No, it is not that,' said Gerald thoughtfully. 'The quiet, peaceful hours, when we are left to what they call meditation, are the best of it. Then one is free to range where he will, in fancy. I 've had as many adventures, thus, as any fortune-seeker of the Arabian Nights. What lands have I not visited! what bold things have I not achieved! ay, and day after day, taken up the same dream where I had left it last, carrying on its fortunes, till the actual work of life seemed the illusion, and this, the dream-world, the true one.'

'So that, after all, this same existence has its pleasures, Gerald?'

'The pleasures are in forgetting it! ignoring that your whole life is a falsehood! They make me kneel at confession to tell my thoughts, while well I know that, for the least blamable of them, I shall be scourged. They oblige me to say that I hate everything that gives a charm to life, and cherish as blessings all that can darken and sadden it. Well, I swear the lie, and they are satisfied! And why are they satisfied? – because out of this corrupt heart, debased by years of treachery and falsehood, they have created the being that they want to serve them.'

'What has led you to think thus hardly of the priesthood?'

'One of themselves, Signor Conte. He told me all that I have repeated to you now, and he counselled me, if I had a friend – one friend on earth – to beseech him to rescue me ere it was too late, ere I was like him.'

'And he – what became of him?'

'He died, as all die who offend the Order, of a wasting fever. His hair was white as snow, though he was under thirty, and his coffin was light as a child's. Look here, Signor Conte,' cried he, as a smile of half incredulity, half pity, curled the Prince's lip, 'look here. You are a great man and a rich: you never knew what it was in life to suffer any, the commonest of those privations poor men pass their days in – '

'Who can dare to say that of me?' cried Charles Edward passionately. 'There's not a toil I have not tasted, there's not a peril I have not braved, there's not a sorrow nor a suffering that have not been my portion; ay, and, God wot, with heavier stake upon the board than ever man played for!'

'Forgive me, Signor Conte,' stammered out the boy, as his eyes filled up at the sight of the emotion he had caused, 'I knew not what I was saying.'

The Prince took little heed of the words, for his aroused thoughts bore him sadly to the mist-clad mountain and the heathery gorges far away; and he strode the room in deep emotion. At last his glance fell upon the youth as, pale and terror-stricken, he stood watching him, and he quickly said: 'I'm not angry with you, Gerald; do not grieve, my poor boy. You will learn, one of these days, that sorrow has its place at fine tables, just as at humbler boards. It helps the rich man to don his robe of purple, just as it aids the beggar to put on his rags. It's a stern conscription that calls on all to serve. But to yourself: you will not be a priest, you say? What, then, would you like – what say you to the life of a soldier?'

'But in what service, Signor Conte?'

'That of your own country, I suppose.'

'They tell me that the king is a usurper, who has no right to be king; and shall I swear faith and loyalty to him?'

'Others have done so, and are doing it every day, boy. It was but yesterday, Lord Blantyre made what they call his submission; and he was the bosom friend of – the Pretender'; and the last words were uttered in a half-scornful laugh.

'I will not hear him called by that name, Signor Conte. So long as I remember anything, I was taught not to endure it.'

'Was that your mother's teaching, Gerald?' said the Prince tenderly.

'It was, sir. I was a very little child; but I can never forget the last prayer I made each night before bed: it was for God's protection to the true Prince; and when I arose I was to say, "Confusion to all who call him the Pretender!"'

'He is not even *that* now,' muttered Charles Edward, as he leaned his head on the mantelpiece.

'I hope, Signor Conte,' said the boy timidly, 'that you never were for the Elector.'

'I have done little for the cause of the Stuarts,' said Charles, with a deep sigh.

'I wish I may live to serve them,' cried the youth, with energy.

The Prince looked long and steadfastly at the boy, and, in a tone that bespoke deep thought, said:

'I want to befriend you, Gerald, if I but knew how. It is clear you have no vocation for the church, and we are here in a land where there is little other career. Were we in France something might be done. I have some friends, however, in that country, and I will see about communicating with them. Send the Frate hither.'

The boy left the room, and speedily returned with Fra Luke, whose anxious glances were turned from the Prince to the youth, in eager curiosity to learn how their interview had gone off.

'Gerald has no ambition to be a monsignore, Frate,' said the Prince laughingly, 'and we mustn't constrain him. They who serve the church should have their hearts in the calling. Do you know of any honest family with whom he might be domesticated for a short time – not in Rome, of course, but in the country; it will only be for a month or two at farthest?'

'There is a worthy family at Orvieto, if it were not too far – '

'Nothing of the kind; Orvieto will suit admirably. Who are these people?'

'The father is the steward of Cardinal Caraffa; but it is a villa that his eminence never visits, and so they live there as in their own palace; and the mountain air is so wholesome there, sick people used to seek the place; and so Tonino, as they call him, takes a boarder, or even two – '

'That is everything we want,' said the Prince, cutting short what he feared might be a long history. 'Let the boy go back now to the college, and do you yourself come here on Saturday morning, and Kelly will arrange all with you.'

'I wish I knew why you are so good to me, Signor Conte,' said the boy, as his eyes filled up with tears.

'I was a friend of your family, Gerald,' said Charles, as he fixed his eyes on the friar, to enforce his former caution.

'And am I never to see you again, signor,' cried he eagerly.

'Yes, to be sure, you shall come here; but I will settle all that another time – on Saturday, Fra; and now, good-bye.

The boy grasped the hand with which the Prince waved his farewell, and kissed it rapturously; and Charles, overcome at length by feelings he had repressed till then, threw his arms around the boy's neck, and pressed him to his bosom.

Fra Luke, terrified how such a moment might end, hurried the youth from the room, and retired.

CHAPTER VII. THE VILLA AT ORVIETO

If the villa life of Italy might prove a severe trial of temper and spirits to most persons, to young Gerald, trained in all the asceticism of a convent, it was a perfect paradise. The wild and far-spreading landscape imparted a glorious sense of liberty, which grew with each day's enjoyment of it. It was a land of mountain and forest – those deep, dark woods of chestnut-trees traversed with the clear and rapid rivulets so common in the Roman States, with here and there, at rare intervals, the solitary hut of a charcoal-burner. In these vast solitudes, silent as the great savannahs of the South, he passed his days – now roaming in search of game, now dreamily lying, book in hand, beside a river's bank, or strolling listlessly along, tasting, in the very waywardness of an untrammelled will, an ecstasy only known to those who have felt captivity.

Though there were several young people in the family of the Intendente, Gerald had no companionship with any of them: the boys were boorish, uneducated, and coarse-minded, and the girls, with one exception, were little better. Ninetta, it is true, was gentler; her voice was soft, and her silky hair and soft, dark eyes had a strange, subduing influence about them; but even she was far from that ideal his imagination had pictured, nor could he, by all his persuasions, induce her to share his raptures for Ariosto, or the still more passionate delight that Petrarch gave him. He was just opening that period of youth when the heart yearns for some object of affection – some centre around which its own hopes and fears, its wishes and aspirations, may revolve. It is wonderful how much imagination contributes in such cases, supplying graces and attractions where nature has been a niggard, and giving to the veriest commonplace character traits of distinctive charm.

Ninetta was quite pretty enough for all this, but she was no more. Without a particle of education, she had never raised her mind beyond the commonest daily cares; and what with the vines, the olives, the chestnuts, the festivals of the church, and little family gatherings, her life had its sphere of duties so full as to leave no time for the love-sick wanderings of an idle boy.

If she was disposed to admire him when, in fits of wild energy, he would pass nights and days in chase of the wild boar, or follow the track of a wolf, with the steadfast tenacity of a hound, she cared little for his intervals of dreamy fancy, nor lent any sympathy to joys or sorrows which had no basis in reality; and when her indifference had gone so far as to offend him, she would gently smile and say, 'Never mind, Gerald; the Contessina will come one of these days, and she'll be charmed with all these "moonings."' Whether piqued by the tone of this commiseration, or careless as to its meaning, he never thought of asking who the Contessina might be, until one morning a showily-dressed courier arrived at the villa to announce that, ere the end of the week, the Cardinal's niece and her governante were to arrive, and remain for, probably, several weeks there.

It was two years since her last visit, and great was the commotion to prepare a suitable reception for her. Saloons that had been carefully closed till now were immediately opened, and all the costly furniture uncovered. Within doors and without the work of preparation went briskly on. Troops of labourers were employed in the grounds and the gardens. Fresh parterres of flowers were planted beneath the windows; fountains long dried up were taught to play, and jets of many a fantastic kind threw their sportive showers on the grass.

Gerald took immense interest in all these details, to which his natural taste imparted many a happy suggestion. By his advice the statues were arranged in suitable spots, and a hundred little devices of ingenuity came from his quick intelligence. 'The Contessina will be delighted with this! How she will love that!' were exclamations that rewarded him for every fresh exertion; and, doubtless, he had fashioned to his own heart a Contessina, for he never asked a question, nor made one single inquiry about her, the real one. As little was he prepared for the great *cortège* which preceded her coming – troops of servants, saddle-horses, fourgons of luggage, even furniture kept pouring in, until the villa, so tranquil and deserted in its appearance, became like some vast and popular hotel. There

was something almost regal in the state and preparation that went forward; and when, at the close of a long summer day, two mounted couriers dashed up to the door, all heated and dust-covered, quickly followed by two heavy coaches with scarlet panels, Gerald's curiosity at length got the upper hand, and he stole to a window to watch the descent of her for whom all these cares had been provided. What was his astonishment to see a little girl, apparently younger than himself, spring lightly to the ground, and, after a brief gesture of acknowledgment to the welcome tendered her, pass into the house. He had seen enough, however, to remark that her long and beautiful hair was almost golden in tint, and that her eyes, whatever their colour, were large and lustrous. He would have dwelt with more pleasure on her beauty had he not marked, in the haughty gestures she vouchsafed and the proud carriage of her head, a bearing he, not unfairly, ascribed to a character imperious and exacting – almost insolent, indeed, in its requirement of respect.

Guglia Ridolfi was, however, the greatest heiress in the Roman States: she was the niece of a cardinal, the granddaughter of a grandee of Spain, and, more than all, had been taught to reflect on these facts from the earliest years of her girlhood. It had been for years the policy of the Cardinal to increase the *prestige* of her position by every means in his power; and they who knew the ambitious nature of the man could easily see how, in the great game he played, his own future aggrandisement was as much included as was her elevation. Left without a father or mother when a mere infant, she had been confided to the care of her uncle. Surrounded with teachers of every kind, she only learned what and when she pleased, her education being, in fact, the result of certain impulses which swayed her from time to time. As she was gifted with great quickness, however, and a remarkable memory, she seemed to make the most astonishing progress, and her fame as a linguist and her reputation for accomplishments were the talk of Rome.

She had all the waywardness, caprice, and instability such a discipline might be supposed to produce, and so completely sated with amusement and pleasure was she that now, as a mere child, or little more, she actually pined away from sheer *ennui* of life. A momentary change of place afforded her a slight passing satisfaction, and so she had come down to Orvieto to stay some time, and persuade herself, if she could, that she enjoyed it. Strangely enough, nothing in either her general appearance or her gestures betrayed this weariness of the world: her eyes were bright, her look animated, her step active. It was only when watching her closely that one could see how estranged her thoughts were from what seemed to fill them; and how, at times, a low, faint sigh would escape her, even when she was apparently occupied and interested.

It was rumoured that these very traits of her disposition were what had attached her uncle so fondly to her, and that he recognised in them the indications of a blood and a race which had always made their way in life, subjecting others to their rule, and using them as mere tools for their own advancement. One thing was certain: he curbed her in nothing; every wild weed of her heart grew up in all its own luxuriance, and she was the ideal of imperiousness and self-will.

Either from caprice or settled purpose – it were hard to say which – the Cardinal affected to submit his own plans to her, and he consulted her about many things which were clearly beyond the sphere of either her years or her knowledge, but to which her replies gave him the sort of guidance that gamblers are wont to accept for the accidents of play; and often had 'Da Guglia's' counsels decided him when his mind was wavering between two resolves. Whether from perceiving the ascendency she thus obtained over her uncle's mind, or that really, to her pleasure-sick heart, these sterner themes gave her a gleam of interest, but gradually she turned her thoughts to the great events of the day, and listened with eagerness only to subjects of State craft and intrigue.

Such was she to whose morning levee Gerald was summoned on the day after her arrival, when, in a sort of vassalage, the Intendente, followed by his family and the villagers, were admitted to pay their homage. It was not without a certain compulsion Gerald yielded to this customary act of deference; nor was his compliance more gracefully accorded when he learned that he was supposed

to be a member of the steward's family, as, if he were known to be a stranger, it was almost certain the Contessina would not suffer him to remain there.

It solved much of his difficulty to be told that in all likelihood she would never notice nor remark him. She rarely did more than listen to the few words of routine gratulation the Intendente spoke, and with a slight nod of her head intimate that they might retire. 'Then, why am I needed at all? Why can't this ceremony go on without me?' cried he half peevishly.

'Because, if she were afterwards to see you about the grounds, she is quite capable of remembering that you had not presented yourself on her arrival. She forgets nothing.'

'That's true,' broke in the Intendente. 'It was but the last time she came here she remarked that the lace border of my hat was torn, and said to me, "Signor Maurizio, you must have lazy daughters, for I saw that piece of gold braid torn, as it is now, on the last two visits I made here."'

Gerald turned away in ill-humour, for he was vexed that any act of servitude should be required of him.

There is a strange mystery in that atmosphere of deference which arises from the united submission of many to one whom they would honour and reverence. The most stubborn asserter of equality has not failed to own this, as he has stood among the crowd before a throne. The sentiment of homage is quickly contagious, and few there are who can steel their hearts against the feelings of that homage which fills every breast about him. Gerald experienced this as he found himself moving slowly along in the procession toward the chamber where the Contessina held her court. The splendid suite of rooms, filled with objects of art, the massive candelabra of gilded bronze, the costly tables of malachite and agate, all obtained their full share of admiration from the simple villagers, whose whispered words almost savoured of worship, until, awe-stricken, they found themselves in a magnificent chamber, hung with pictures from floor to ceiling. In a deep window recess, from which a vast view opened over mountain and forest, the Contessina was standing, book in hand, gazing listlessly on the landscape, and never noticing in the slightest that dense throng which now gathered in the lower part of the room.

'Maurizio and the peasants have come to pay their duty, whispered a thin, elderly lady, who acted as governante to the young countess.

'Well, be it so,' said she languidly. And now a very meanly-clad priest, poor and wretched in appearance, came crouchingly forward to kiss her hand. She gave it with averted head, and in a way that indicated little of courtesy, while he bent tremblingly over it, as beseemed one whose lips touched the fingers of a great cardinal's niece. Maurizio followed, and then the other members of his household. When it came to Gerald's turn to advance, 'You must, you must; it is your duty,' whispered the steward, as, rebel-like, the youth wished to pass on without the act of deference.

'Is this Tonino?' asked the Contessina, suddenly turning her head, for her quick ears had caught the words of remonstrance. 'Is this Tonino?'

'No, Eccelenza; Tonino was drawn in the conscription, muttered the steward, in confusion. 'He knew your Excellency would have got him off, if you were here, but – '

'Which is this, then – your second son, or your third?'

'Neither, Eccelenza, neither; he is a sort of connection – "

'Nothing of the kind,' broke in Gerald. 'I'm of the blood of the Geraldines.'

'Native princes,' said the Contessina quickly. 'Irish, too! How came you here?'

'He has been living with us, Eccelenza, for some months back,' chimed in the steward; 'an honest Frate, one – '

'Let himself answer me,' said the Contessina.

'They took, me from the Jesuit college and placed me here,' said the boy.

'Who do you mean by they?' asked she.

'The Frate, and the Count; perhaps, indeed, I owe the change more to him.'

'What is his name?'

'I never heard it. I only saw him once, and then for a short time.'

'How old are you?'

'I think, fifteen.'

'Indeed. I should have thought you younger than I am,' said she, half musingly.

'Oh, no; I look much, much older,' said Gerald, as he gazed at her bright and beautiful features.

'Don Cesare,' said she, turning to a pale old man beside her, 'you must write to the rector of the college, and let us learn about this boy – how he came there, and why he left. And so,' said she, addressing Gerald, 'you think it beneath your quality to kiss a lady's hand?'

'No, no!' cried he rapturously, as he knelt down and pressed her hand to his lips.

'It is not so you should do it, boy,' broke in the governante. 'Yours has been ill training, wherever you have got it.'

'Alas! I have had little or none,' said Gerald sorrowfully.

'Pass on, boy; move on,' said the governante, and Gerald's head drooped as his heavy footsteps stole along. He never dared to look up as he went. Had he done so, what a thrill might his heart have felt to know that the Contessina's eyes had followed him to the very door.

'There, you have done for me and yourself too, with your stupid pride about your blood,' cried the Intendente, when they gained the courtyard. 'The next thing will be an order to send me to Rome, to explain why I have taken you to live here.'

'Well, I suppose you can give your reasons for it,' said Gerald gravely.

'Except that it was my evil fortune, I know of none other/ broke out the other angrily, and turned away. From each, in turn, of the family did he meet with some words of sarcasm and reproof; and though Ninetta said nothing, her tearful eyes and sorrow-stricken features were the hardest of all the reproaches he endured.

'What am I, that I should bring shame and sorrow to those who befriend me!' cried he, as with an almost bursting heart he threw himself upon his bed; and sobbed there till he fell asleep. When the first gleam of sunlight broke upon him he awoke, and as suddenly remembered all his griefs of the day before, and he sat down upon his bed to think over what he should do.

'If I could but find out the Conte at Rome, or even the Fra Luke,' thought he; but alas! he had no clue to either. 'I know it; I have it,' exclaimed he at last. 'There is a life which I can live without fearing reproach from those about me. I'll go and be a charcoal-burner in the Maremma. The Carbonari will not refuse to have me, and I'll set out for the forest at once.'

When Gerald had uttered this resolve it was in the bitterness of despair that he spoke, since of all the varied modes by which men earned a livelihood, none was in such universal disrepute as that of a charcoal-burner; and when the humblest creature of the streets said 'I 'd as soon be a charcoal-burner,' he expressed the direst aspect of his misery.

It was not, indeed, that either the life or the labour had anything degrading in itself, but, generally, they who followed it were outcasts and vagabonds – the irreclaimable sweepings of towns, or the incorrigible youth of country districts, who sought in the wild and wandering existence a freedom from all ties of civilisation; the life of the forest in all its savagery, but in all its independence. The chief resort of these men was a certain district in those low-lying lands along the coast, called Maremmas, and where, from the undrained character of the soil and rapid decomposition of vegetable matter ever going on, disease of the most deadly form existed – ague and fever being the daily condition of all who dwelt there. Nothing but habits of wildest excess, and an utter indifference to life, could make men brave such an existence; but their recompense was, that this district was a species of sanctuary where the law never entered. Beyond certain well-known limits the hardiest carbineer never crossed; and it was well known that he who crossed that frontier came as fugitive, and not as foe. Many, it is true, of those who sojourned here were attainted with the deepest crimes – men for whom no hope of return to the world remained, outcasts branded with undying infamy; but others

there were, mere victims of dissipation and folly – rash youths, who had so irretrievably compromised their fair fame that they had nothing left but to seek oblivion.

The terrible stories Gerald had heard of these outcasts from his school-fellows, the horror in which they were held by all honest villagers, inspired him with a strange interest to see them with his own eyes. It savoured, too, of courage; it smacked, to his heart, like bravery, to throw himself among such reckless and daredevil associates, and he felt a sort of hero to himself when he had determined on it. ‘Ay,’ said he, ‘they have been taunting me here for some time back, that my friends take little trouble about me – that they half forget me, and so on. Let us see if I cannot make a path for myself, and spare them all future trouble.’

CHAPTER VIII. THE TANA IN THE MAREMMA

Simply turning his steps westward, in the direction where he knew the Maremma lay, Gerald set out on his lonely journey. It was nothing new in his habits to be absent the entire day, and even night, so that no attention was drawn to his departure till late the following day; nor, perhaps, would it have been noticed then, if a summons had not come from the Contessina that she desired to speak with him. A search was at once made, inquiries instituted on every side, and soon the startling fact acknowledged, that he had gone away, none knew whither or why.

The Contessina at once ordered a pursuit; he was to be overtaken and brought back. Mounted couriers set off on every side, scouring the high-roads, interrogating hotel-keepers, giving descriptions of the fugitive at passport stations – taking, in short, all the palpable and evident means of discovery; while he – for whose benefit this solicitude was intended – was already deep among the dreary valleys to the west of the Lake of Bolseno. The country through which he journeyed was, indeed, sad-coloured as his own thoughts. Hills, not large enough to be called mountains, succeeded each other in unbroken succession, their sides covered with a poor and burned-up herbage, interspersed with masses of rock or long patches of shingle; no wood, no cultivation on any side. A few starved and wretched sheep, watched by one even more wretched still, were all that represented life; while in the valleys, a stray hut or two, generally on the borders of a swampy lake, offered the only thing in the shape of a village. After he had crossed the great post-road from Sienna to Rome, Gerald entered a tract of almost perfect desolation.

He bought two loaves of rye-bread and some apples at a small house on the road, and with this humble provision slung in a handkerchief at his side, set out once more. At first it was rather a relief to him to be utterly alone; his own thoughts were his best companions, and he would have shrunk from the questionings his appearance was certain to elicit; but as the time wore on, and the noon of the second day was passed, he felt the dreariness of the solitude creeping over him, and would gladly have met with one with whom he could have interchanged even a few words of greeting. Not a human trace, however, was now to be seen; for he had gained that low-lying district which, stretching beneath the mountain of Bolseno, extends, in patches of alternate lake and land, to the verge of the Maremma. This tract is not even a sheep-walk, and although in mid-winter the sportsman may venture in pursuit of the wild duck or the mallard, the pestilential atmosphere produced by summer heat makes the spot a desert. Gerald was not long a stranger to the sickly influences of the place: a strange sense of dizziness would now and then come over him – something less than sickness, but usually leaving him confused and half stunned; great weariness, too, beset him; a desire to lie down and sleep, so strong as almost to be irresistible, seized him, but a dread of wild beasts – not unfrequent in these places – enabled him to conquer this tendency. The sun bore down with all its noonday force upon him, while an offensive odour from the stagnant waters oppressed him almost to choking.

He walked on, however, on and on, but almost like one in a dream. Thoughts of the past superseded all sensations of the present in his mind, and he fancied he was back once more in the old college of the Jesuit fathers. He heard the bell that summoned him to the schoolroom, and he hastened to put himself in his place, marching with crossed arms and bent-down head, in accustomed fashion. Then he heard his name called aloud, and one of the fathers told him to stand aside, for he was ‘up’ for punishment; and Fra Luke was there, wishing to speak to him, but not admitted; and then – how, he knew not – but he was gazing on grizzly bears and white-tusked boars, in great cages; and there they stood spell-bound and savage, but unable to spring out, though it was but glass confined them; and through all these scenes the wild strains of the tarantella sounded, and the light gestures and wistful looks of Marietta, whose hair, however, was no longer dark, but golden and bright, like the Contes-sina’s. And as suddenly all changed, and there stood the Contessina herself, with one hand pressed to her eyes, and she was weeping, and Gerald felt – but how he did not know – he had

offended her; and he trembled at his fault and hated himself, and, stooping down, he fell at last at her feet, and sobbed for pardon.

And there he lay, and there night found him sleeping – the long sleep that awakes to fever. Damp mists arose, charged with all the deadly vapours of the spot; foul airs steamed from the hot earth, to mingle with his blood, and thicken and corrupt it. Though the sky was freckled with stars, their light was dimmed by the dull atmosphere that prevailed, for the place was pestilential and deadly.

When day broke racking pains tortured him in every limb, and his head felt as though splitting with every throb of its arteries. A dreadful thirst, almost maddening in its craving, was on him, and though a rivulet rippled close by, he could not crawl to it; and now the hot sun beamed down upon him, and the piercing rays darted into his brain, penetrating it in all directions – sending wild fancies, horrible and ghastly visions, through his mind. And combats with wild beasts, and wounds, and suffering, and long days of agony and suspense, all came pouring in upon him, as vial after vial of misery bathed his poor, distracted intellect.

Three days of this half-conscious state – like so many long years of suffering they were – and then he sank into the low torpor that forms the last stage of the fever. It was thus, insensible and dying, a traveller found him, as the third evening was falling. The stranger stooped down to examine the almost lifeless figure, and it was long before he could convince himself that vitality yet lingered there: from the dried and livid lips no breath seemed to issue; the limbs fell heavily to either side as they were moved; and it was only after a most careful examination that he could detect a faint fluttering motion of the heart.

Whether it was that the case presented so little of hope, or that he was one not much given to movements of charity, but the traveller, after all these investigations, turned again to pursue his path. He had not gone far, however, when, gaining the rise of a hill, he cast his eyes back over the dreary landscape, and again they fell upon that small mound of human clay beside the lake. Moved by an impulse that, even to himself, was unaccountable, he returned to the spot and stood for some minutes contemplating Gerald. It might be that in the growing shades of the evening the gloomy desolation spoke more touchingly to his heart; it might be that a feeling of compassionate pity stirred him; as likely as either was it a mere caprice, as, stooping down, he raised the wasted form, and threw it loosely over one shoulder, and then strode out upon his way once more.

The stranger was a man of great size and personal strength, and though heavily framed, possessed considerable activity. His burden seemed little to impede his movements, and almost as little to engage his thoughts, and as he breasted the wild mountain, or waded the many streams that crossed his path, he went along without appearing to think more of him he was rescuing. It was a long road, too, and it was deep into the night ere he reached a solitary house, in a little slip of land between two lakes, and over whose door a withered bough denoted a cabaret.

'What, in the name of all the saints, have you brought us here?' said an old man who quickly responded to his knock at the door.

'I found him as you see beside the Lagoscuro,' said the other, laying down his burden. 'How he came there I can't tell you, and I don't suspect you'll ever get the report from himself.'

'He's not a contadino,' said the old man, as he examined the boy's features, and then gazed upon the palms of his hands.

'No; nor is he a Roman, I take it: he's of German or English blood. That fair skin and blonde hair came from the north.'

'One of the Cavalrista, belike!'

'Just as likely one of the circus people; but why they should leave him there to die seems strange, except that strangers deem this Maremma fever a sort of plague, and, perhaps, when he was struck down they only thought of saving themselves from the contagion.'

'That wouldn't be human, Master Gabriel – '

'Wouldn't it, though!' cried Gerald's rescuer, with a bitter laugh. 'That's exactly the name for it, caro Pippo. It is the beasts of prey – the tiger and lion – that defend their young; it is the mild rabbit and the tender woman that destroy theirs.' The innkeeper shook his head, as though the controversy were too subtle for him, and, bending down to examine the boy more closely, 'What's this, Master Gabriel,' said he, taking a peculiar medal that hung suspended round his neck.

'He was a colleger of some sort certainly,' cried Gabriel. 'It's clear, therefore, he wasn't, as we suspected, one of the Cavalrista. I'll tell you, Pippo; I have it: this lad has made his escape from some of the seminaries at Rome, and in his wanderings has been struck down by the fever. The worthy Frati have, ere this, told his parents that he died in all the hopes of the church, and is an angel already – '

'There, there,' interposed Pippo rebukingly; 'no luck ever came of mocking a priest. Let's try if we can do anything for the lad. Tina will be up presently, and look to him'; and with this he spread out some leaves beside the wall, and covering them with a cloak, laid the sick boy gently on them.

'There, see; his lips are moving – he has swallowed some of the water – he'll get about – I'll swear to it!' cried the other. 'A fellow that begins life in that fashion has always his mission for after years. At all events, Pippo, don't disturb me for the next twelve hours, for I mean to sleep so long; and let me tell you, too, I have taken my last journey to Bon Convento. The letters may lie in the post-office till doomsday, ere I go in seach of them.'

'Well, well, have your sleep out, and then – '

'And then?' cried Gabriel, turning suddenly round, as he was about to quit the room. 'I wish to Heaven you could tell me, what then!'

Old Pippo shook his head mournfully, heaved a heavy sigh, and turned away.

Tina, a peasant girl, pale and sickly, but with that energy of soul that belongs to the Roman race, soon made her appearance, and at once addressed herself to nurse the sick boy. 'I ought to know this Maremma fever well,' said she, with a faint sigh; 'it struck me down when a child, and has never left my blood since.' Making a polenta with some strong red wine, she gave him a spoonful from time to time, and by covering him up warmly induced perspiration, the first crisis of the disease. 'There,' cried she, after some hours of assiduous care; 'there, he is safe; and God knows if he 'll bless me for this night's work after all! It is a sad, dreary life, even to the luckiest!'

While Gerald lay thus – and it was his fate in this fashion to pass some six long weeks, ere he had strength to sit up or move about the house – let us say a few words of those to whose kindness he owed his life. Old Pippo Baldi had kept the little inn of Borghetto all his life. It was his father's and grandfather's before him. Situated in this dreary, unwholesome tract, with a mere mountain bridle-path – not a road – leading to it, there seemed no reason why a house of entertainment – even the humblest – could be wanted in such a spot; and, indeed, the lack of all comfort and accommodation bespoke how little trade it drove. The 'Tana,' however, as it was called, had a brisk business in the long dark nights of winter, since it was here that the smugglers from the Tuscan frontier resorted, to dispose of their wares to the up-country dealers; and bargains for many a thousand scudi went on in that dreary old kitchen, while bands of armed contrabandieri scoured the country. To keep off the Pope's carbineers – in case that redoubtable corps could persuade themselves to adventure so far – the Maremma fever, a malady that few ever eradicated from their constitution, was the best protection the smugglers possessed; and the Tana was thus a sanctuary as safe as the rocky islands that lay off St. Stephano. A disputed question of boundary also added to the safety of the spot, and continual litigation went on between the courts of Florence and Rome as to which the territory belonged – contests the scandal-mongering world implied might long since have been terminated, had not the cardinal-secretary Manini been suspected of being in secret league with the smugglers. The Tana was, therefore, a sort of refuge; and more than one, gravely compromised by crime, had sought out that humble hostel, as his last place of security. To the refugee from the north of Italy it was easily available, lying only a few miles beyond the Tuscan frontier, while it was no less open to those who gained any port of the shore near St. Stephano.

In a wild and melancholy waste, with two dark and motionless lakes girt in by low mountains, the Tana stood, the very ideal of desolation. The strip of land on which it was built was little wider than a mere bridge, between the lakes, and had evidently been selected as a position capable of defence against the assault of a strong force, and two rude breastworks of stone yet bore witness that a military eye had scanned the place, and improved its advantages. Within, a stray loop-hole for musketry still showed that defence had occupied the spirits of those who held it, while a low, flat-bottomed boat, moored at a stake before the door, provided for escape in the last extremity. The great curiosity of the place, however, was a kind of large hall or chamber, where the smugglers transacted business with their customers, and the walls of which had been decorated with huge frescoes, in charcoal, by no less a hand than Franzoni himself, whose fate it had once been to pass months here. Taking for his subjects the lives of the various refugees who had sojourned in the Tana, he had illustrated them in a series of bold and vigorous sketches, and assuredly every breach of the Decalogue had here its portraiture, with some accompanying legend beneath to show in whose honour the picture had been painted. Pippo, who had supplied from memory all the incidents thus communicated, regarded these as perfect treasures, and was wont to show them with all the pride of a connoisseur. 'The maestro ' – so he ever called Franzoni – 'the maestro,' said he, 'never saw Cimballi, who strangled the Countess of Soissons, and yet, just from my description, he has made a likeness his brother would swear to. And there, look at that fellow asking alms of the Cardinal Frescobaldi – that 's Fornari. He 's merely there to see the cardinal, and he's sure he can recognise him; for he is engaged to stab him on his way to the Quirinal, the day of his election for Pope. The little fellow yonder with the hump is the Piombino, who poisoned his mother. He was drowned in the lake out there. I don't think it was quite fair of the maestro to paint him in that fashion'; and here he would point to a little humped-backed creature rowing in a boat, with the devil steering, the flashing eyes of the fiend seeming to feast on the tortures of fear depicted in the other's face.

Several there were of a humorous kind. Here, a group of murderous ruffians were kneeling to receive a pontifical blessing. There, a party of Papal carbineers were in full flight from the pursuit of a single horseman armed with a bottle; while, in an excess of profanity that Pippo shuddered to contemplate, there was a portrait of himself, as a saint, offering the safeguard of the Tana to all persecuted sinners; and what an ill-favoured assemblage were they who thus congregated at his shrine!

Poor Gerald had lain for days gazing on the singular groupings and strange scenes these walls presented. At first, to his disordered intellect, they were but shapes of horror, wild and incongruous. The savage faces that scowled on him in paint sat, in his dreams, beside his pillow. The terrible countenances and frantic gestures were carried into his sleeping thoughts, and often did he awake, with a cry of agony, at some fearful scene of crime thus suggested. As his mind acquired strength, however, they became a source of endless amusement. Innumerable stories grew out of them: romances, whose adventures embraced every land and sea; and his excited imagination revelled in inventing trials and miseries for some, while for others he sought out every possible escape from disaster. His solitude had no need of either companionship or books; his mind, stimulated by these sketches, could invent unweariedly, so that, at last, he really lived in an ideal world, peopled with daring adventurers, and abounding in accidents by flood and field.

One day, as Gerald lay musing on his bed of chestnut-leaves, the door of his room was opened quietly, and a large, powerfully-built man entered. He walked with noiseless steps forward, placed a chair in front of Gerald, and sat down. The boy gazed steadfastly at him, and so they remained a considerable time, each staring fixedly at the other. To one who, like Gerald, had passed weeks in weaving histories from the looks and expressions of the faces around him, the features on which he now gazed might well excite interest. Never was there, perhaps, a face in which adverse and conflicting passions were more palpably depicted. A noble and massive head, covered with a profusion of black hair, rose from temples of exquisite symmetry, greatly indented at either side, and forming the walls of two orbits of singular depth. His eyes were large, dark, and lustrous, the expression usually sad.

Here, however, ended all that indicated good in the face. The nose was short, with wide expanded nostrils, and the mouth large, coarse, and sensual; but the lower jaw, which was of enormous breadth, and projected forward, gave a character of actual ferocity that recalled the image of a wild boar. The whole meaning of the face was power – power and indomitable will. Whatever he meditated of good or evil, you could easily predict that nothing could divert him from attempting; and there was in the carriage of his head, all his gestures, and his air, the calm self-possession of one that seemed to say to the world, 'I defy you.'

As Gerald gazed in a sort of fascination at these strange features, he was almost startled by the tone of a voice so utterly unlike what he was prepared for. The stranger spoke in a low, deep strain of exquisite modulation, and with that peculiar mellowness of accent that seems to leave its echo in the heart after it. He had merely asked him how he felt, and then, seeing the difficulty with which the boy replied, he went on to tell how he himself had discovered him on the side of the Lagoscuro at nightfall, and carried him all the way to the Tana. 'The luck was,' said he, 'that *you* happened to be light, and *I* strong.'

'Say, rather, that *you* were kind-hearted and *I* in trouble,' muttered the boy, as his eyes filled up.

'And who knows, boy, but you may be right!' cried he, as though a sudden thought had crossed him; 'your judgment has just as much grounds as that of the great world!' As he spoke, his voice rose out of its tone of former gentleness and swelled into a roll of deep, sonorous meaning; then changing again, he asked – 'By what accident was it that you came there?'

Gerald drew a long sigh, as though recalling a sorrowful dream; and then, with many a faltering word, and many an effort to recall events as they occurred, told all that he remembered of his own history.

'A scholar of the Jesuit college; without father or mother; befriended by a great man, whose name he has never heard,' muttered the other to himself. 'No bad start in life for such a world as we have now before us. And your name?'

'Gerald Fitzgerald. I am Irish by birth.'

The stranger seemed to ponder long over these words, and then said: 'The Irish have a nationality of their own – a race – a language – traditions. Why have they suffered themselves to be ruled by England?'

'I suppose they couldn't help it,' said Gerald, half smiling.

'Which of us can say that? who has ever divined where the strength lay till the day of struggle called it forth? Chance, chance – she is the great goddess!'

'I'd be sorry to think so,' said Gerald resolutely.

'Indeed, boy!' cried the other, turning his large, full eyes upon the youth, and staring steadfastly at him; then passing his hand over his brow, he added, in a tone of much feeling: 'And yet it is as I have said. Look at the portraits around us on these walls. There they are, great or infamous, as accident has made them. That fellow yonder, with that noble forehead and generous look, he stabbed the confessor who gave the last rites to his father, just because the priest had heard some tales to his disadvantage; a scrupulous sense of delicacy moved him – there was a woman's name in it – and he preferred a murder to a scandal! There, too, there's Marocchi, who poisoned his mother the day of her second marriage. Ask old Pippo if he ever saw a gentler-hearted creature: he lived here two years, and died of the Maremma fever, that he caught from a peasant whom he was nursing. And there again, that wild-looking fellow with the scarlet cap – he it was who stole the Medici jewels out of the Pitti to give his mistress, and killed himself afterwards when she deserted him. Weigh the good and evil of these men's hearts, boy, and you have subtle weights if you can strike the balance for or against them. We are all but what good or evil fortune makes us, just as a landscape catches its tone from light; and what is glorious in sunshine is bleak and desolate and dreary beneath a leaden sky and lowering atmosphere!'

'I'll not believe it,' said the boy boldly. 'I have read of fellows that never showed the great stuff they were made of until adversity had called it forth. They were truly great!'

'Truly great!' repeated the other, with an intense mockery. 'The truly great we never hear of. They die in workhouses or garrets – poor, dreary optimists, working out of their finespun fancies hopeful destinies for those who sneer at them.

The idols men call great are but the types of Force – mere Force. One day it is courage; another, it is money; another day, political craft is the object of worship. Come, boy,' said he, in a lighter vein, 'what have these worthy Jesuits taught you?'

'Very different lessons from yours,' said the youth stoutly. 'They taught me to honour and reverence those set in authority over me.'

'Good; and then – '

'They taught me the principles of my faith; the creed of the Church.'

'What Church?'

'What but the one Church – the Catholic!'

'Why, there are fifty, child, and each with five hundred controversies within it. Popes denying Councils; Councils rejecting Popes; Synods against Bishops; Bishops against Presbyters. What a mockery is it all!' cried he passionately. 'We who, in our imperfect forms of language, have not even names for separate odours, but say, "this smells like the violet," and "that like the rose," presume to talk of eternity and that vast universe around us, as though our paltry vocabulary could compass such themes! But to come back: were you happy there?'

'No; I could not bear the life, nor did I wish to be a priest.'

'What would you be, then?'

'I wish I knew,' said the boy fervently.

'I'm a bad counsellor,' said the other, with a bitter smile; 'I have tried several things, and failed in all.'

'I never could have thought that you could fail,' said Gerald slowly, as in calm composure he gazed on the massive features before him.

'I have done with failure now,' said the other; 'I mean to achieve success next. It is something to have learned a great truth, and this is one, boy – our world is a huge hunting-ground, and it is better to play wolf than lamb. Don't turn your eyes to those walls, as if the fellows depicted there could gainsay me – they were but sorry scoundrels, the bad ones; the best were but weakly good.'

'You do but pain me when you speak thus,' said Gerald; 'you make me think that you are one who, having done some great crime, waits to avenge the penalty he has suffered on the world that inflicted it.'

'What if you were partly right, boy! Not but I would protest against the word crime, or even fault, as applied to me; still you are near enough to make your guess a good one. I have a debt to pay, and I mean to pay it.'

'I wish I had never quitted the college.' said the boy, and the tears rolled heavily down his cheeks.

'It is not too late to retrace your steps. The cell and the scourge – the fathers know the use of both – will soon condone your offence; and when they have sapped the last drop of manhood out of your nature, you will be all the fitter for your calling.'

With these harsh words, uttered in tones as cruel, the stranger left the room; while Gerald, covering his face with both hands, sobbed as though his heart were breaking.

'Ah! Gabriel has been talking to him. I knew how it would be,' muttered old Pippo, as he cast a glance within the room. 'Poor child! better for him had he left him to die in the Maremma.'

CHAPTER IX. THE ‘COUR’ OF THE ALTIERI

A LONG autumn day was drawing to its close in Rome, and gradually here and there might be seen a few figures stealing listlessly along, or seated in melancholy mood before the shop-doors, trying to catch a momentary breath of air ere the hour of sunset should fall. All the great and noble of the capital had left a month before for the sea-side, or for Albano, or the shady valleys above Lucca. You might walk for days and never meet a carriage. It was a city in complete desolation. The grass sprang up between the stones, and troops of seared leaves, carried from the gardens, littered the empty streets. The palaces were barred up and fastened, the massive doors looking as if they had not opened for centuries. In one alone, throughout the entire city, did any signs of habitation linger, and here a single lamp threw its faint light over a wide courtyard, giving a ghost-like air to the vaulted corridors and dim distances around. All was still and silent within the walls; not a light gleamed from a window, not a sound issued. A solitary figure walked with weary footsteps up and down, stopping at times to listen, as if he heard the noise of one approaching, and then resuming his dreary round again.

As night closed in, a second stranger made his appearance, and timidly halting at the porter’s lodge, asked leave to enter; but the porter had gone to refresh himself at a neighbouring café, and the visitor passed in of his own accord. He was in a friar’s robe, and by his dusty dress and tired look showed that he had had a long journey; indeed, so overcome was he with fatigue that he sat down at once on a stone bench, depositing his heavy bag beside him. The oppressive heat, the fatigue, the silence of the lonesome spot, all combined, composed him to sleep; and poor Fra Luke, for it was he, crossed his arms before him, and snored away manfully.

Astonished by the deep-drawn breathing, the other stranger drew nigh, and, as well as the imperfect light permitted, examined him. He himself was a man of immense stature, and, though bowed and doubled by age, showed the remnant of a powerful frame: his dress was worn and shabby, but in its cut and in the fashion he wore it, bespoke the gentleman. He gazed long and attentively at the sleeping friar, and then approaching, he took up the bag that lay on the bench. It was weighty, and contained money – a considerable sum, too, as the stranger remarked, while he replaced it. The heavy bang of a door at this moment, and the sound of feet, however, recalled him from this contemplation, and at the same time a low whistle was heard, and a voice, in a subdued tone, called out, ‘O’Sullivan!’

‘Here!’ cried the stranger, who was quickly joined by another.

‘I am sorry to have kept you so long, chief,’ said the latter; ‘but he detained me, watching me so closely, too, that I feared to leave the room.’

‘And how is he – better?’

‘Far from it; he seems to be sinking every hour. His irritability is intense; eternally asking who have called to inquire after him – if Boyer had been to ask, if the Cardinal Caraffa had come. In fact, so eagerly set is his mind on these things, I have been obliged to make the coachman drive repeatedly into the courtyard, and by a loud uproar without convey the notion of a press of visitors.’

‘Has he asked after Barra or myself?’ said the chieftain, after a pause.

‘Yes; he said twice, “We must have our old followers up here – to-morrow or the next day.” But his mind is scarcely settled, for he talked of Florence and the duchess, and then went off about the insult of that arrest in France, which preys upon him incessantly.’

‘And why should it not, Kelly? Was there ever such baseness as that of Louis? Take my word for it, there’s a heavy day of reckoning to come to that house yet for this iniquity. It’s a sore trouble to me to think it will not be in my time, but it is not far off.’

‘Everything is possible now,’ said Kelly. ‘Heaven knows what’s in store for any of us! Men are talking in a way I never heard before. Boyer told me, two days ago, that the garrison of Paris was to be doubled, and Vincennes placed in a perfect state of defence.’

A bitter laugh from the old chieftain showed how he relished these symptoms of terror.

'It will be no laughing matter when it comes,' said Kelly gravely.

'But who *have* called here? Tell me their names,' said O'Sullivan sternly.

'Not one, not one – stay, I am wrong. The cripple who sells the water-melons at the corner of the Babuino, he has been here; and Giacchino, the strolling actor, comes every morning and says, "Give my duty to his Royal Highness."'

A muttered curse broke from O'Sullivan, and Kelly went on: 'It was on Wednesday last he wished to have a mass in the chapel here, and I went to the Quirinal to say so. They should, of course, have sent a cardinal; but who came? – the Vicar of Santa Maria maggiore. I shut the door in his face, and told him that the highest of his masters might have been proud to come in his stead.'

'They are tired of us all, Kelly,' sighed the chieftain. 'I have walked every day of the eight long years I have passed here in the Vatican gardens, and it was only yesterday a guard stopped me to ask if I were noble? – ay, by Heaven, if I were noble! I gulped down my passion and answered, "I am a gentleman in the service of his Royal Highness of England"; and he said, "That may well be, and yet give you no right to enter here." The old Cardinal Balfi was passing, so I just said to his Eminence, "Give me your arm, for you are my junior by three good years." Ay, and he did it too, and I passed in; but I'll go there no more! no more!' muttered he sadly. 'Insults are hard to bear when one's arm is too feeble to resent them.'

Kelly sighed too; and neither spoke for some seconds. 'What heavy breathings are those I hear?' cried Kelly suddenly; 'some one has overheard us.'

'Have no fear of that,' replied the other; 'it is a stout friar, taking his evening nap, on the stone bench yonder.'

Kelly hastened to the spot, and by the struggling gleam of the lamp could just recognise Fra Luke as he lay sleeping, snoring heavily.

'You know him, then?' asked O'Sullivan.

'That do I: he is a countryman of ours, and as honest a soul as lives; but yet I'd just as soon not see him here Fra Luke,' said he, shaking the sleeper's shoulder, 'Fra Luke. By St. Joseph! they must have hard mattresses up there at the convent, or he 'd not sleep so soundly here.'

The burly friar at last stirred, and shook himself like some great water-dog, and then turning his eyes on Kelly, gradually recalled where he was. 'Would he see me, Laurence? would he just let me say one word to him?' muttered he in Kelly's ear.

'Impossible, Fra Luke; he is on a bed of sickness. God alone knows if he is ever to rise up from it!'

The Fra bent his head, and for some minutes continued to pray with great fervour, then turning to Kelly, said: * If it's dying he is, there's no good in disturbing his last moments; but if he was to get well enough to hear it, Laurence, will you promise to let me have two or three minutes beside his bed? Will you, at least* ask him if he 'd see Fra Luke? He 'll know why himself.'

'My poor fellow,' said Kelly kindly, 'like all the world, you fancy that the things which touch yourself must be nearest to the hearts of others. I don't want to learn your secret, Luke – Heaven knows I have more than I wish for in my keeping already! – but take my word for it, the Prince has cares enough on his mind without your asking him to hear yours.'

'Will you give him this, then,' said the Fra, handing him the bag with the money; 'there's a hundred crowns in it just as he gave it to me, Monday was a fortnight. Tell him that – 'here he stopped and wiped his forehead, in confusion of thought; 'tell him that it 's not wanting any more for – for what he knows; that it's all over now; not that he's dead, though – God be praised! – but what am I saying? Oh dear! oh dear! after my swearing never to speak of him!'

'You are safe with me, Luke, depend on that. Only, as to the money, take my advice, and just keep it. He 'll never want to hear more of it. Many a hundred crowns have left this on a worse errand, whatever be its fate.'

'I wouldn't, to save my life! I wouldn't, if it was to keep me from the galleys!'

‘Have your own way, then,’ said Kelly sharply; ‘I must not loiter here’; and so saying, took the bag from the friar’s hand, and moved over toward where O’Sullivan was standing.

‘Come along home with me, friar,’ said O’Sullivan, as Kelly wished them good-night; ‘I’ll give you a glass of Vermouth, and we ‘ll have a talk about the old country.’

CHAPTER X. GABRIEL DE —

'I wish I knew how I could ever repay you, Pippo, for all your kindness to me,' said Gerald, as he sat one fine evening with the old man at the door; 'but when I tell you that I am as poor and as friendless in the world as on that same night when Signor Gabriel found me beside the lake – '

'Not a whit poorer or more alone in the world than the rest of us,' said Pippo good-naturedly. 'We have all a rough journey before us in life, and the least we can do is to help one another.'

The youth grasped the old man's hand and pressed it to his heart.

'Besides,' continued Pippo, 'all your gratitude is owing to Signor Gabriel himself. Any little comforts you have had here have been of his procuring. He it was fetched that doctor from Bolseno, and his own hands carried the little jar of honey from St. Stephano.'

'What a kind heart he has!' cried Gerald eagerly.

'Well,' said Pippo, with a dry, odd smile, 'that's not exactly what people say of him; not but he can do a kind thing too, just as he can do anything.'

'Is he so clever, then?' asked Gerald curiously.

'Is he not!' exclaimed Pippo; 'where has he not travelled, what has he not seen! And then the books he has written – scores of them, they tell me: he's always writing still – whole nights through; after which, instead of going to his bed like any one else, he is off for a plunge in the lake there, though I've told him over and over, that the water that kills fish can never be healthy for a human being!'

'What a strange nature his must be! And what brings him here?'

'That's *his* secret, and it would be *mine* too, if I knew it; for, I promise you, he 's not one it's over safe to talk about.'

'Where does he come from?'

'He 's French, and that's all I can tell you.'

'It can't be for the *chasse* he comes here,' said Gerald musingly. 'There's no game in these mountains. It can scarcely be for seclusion, for he's always rambling away to some village or town near. It's now more than a week since we have seen him. I wish I could make out who or what he is!'

'Would you indeed?' cried a deep voice, as a large, heavy hand fell upon his shoulder; 'and what would the knowledge benefit you, boy?' Gerald looked up, and there stood Gabriel. He was dressed in a loose peasant's frock, and seemed by his mien as if he had come off a long day's march.

'Go in, Pippo, and make me a good salad. Grill me that old hen yonder, and I'll give you a share of a flask of Orvieto that was in the bishop's cellar last night.'

He threw off his knapsack as he spoke, and removing his hat, wiped his heated forehead, and then turning to the youth at his side, he said: 'So, boy, I am a sort of mystery to you, it seems – mayhap others share in that same sentiment – at least I have heard as much. But whence this curiosity on your part? You were a stranger to me, and you are so still. What can it signify to either of us what has happened before we met and knew each other? Life is not a river running in one bed, but a series of streams that follow fifty channels – some pure and limpid, some, perchance, turbid and foul enough. What you have been gives no guarantee to what you may be, remember that!'

He spoke with a tone of sternness that made his words sound like reproof, and the youth held down his head abashed.

'Don't suppose I am angry with you,' continued the other, but in the self-same tone as before; 'nor that I regard this curious desire of yours as ingratitude. You owe me nothing, or next to nothing, and you 're a rare instance of such in life, if within the next ten years the wish will not occur to you at least twenty times, that I had left you to die beside the dark shores of Bolseno!'

'I can well believe it may be so,' said Gerald with a sigh.

'Not that this is my own philosophy,' said the other, in a voice of powerful meaning. 'I soon made the discovery that life was not a garden, but a hunting-ground, and that the wolves had the best

of it! Ay, boy,' cried he, with a kind of savage exultation, 'there's the experience of one whose boast it is to know something of his fellows!'

Gerald was silent, and for some time Gabriel also did not speak. At last, looking steadfastly at the youth, he said: 'I have been up to Rome these last three days. My errand there was to learn something about *you*.'

'About *me*?' said Gerald, blushing deeply.

'Yes. It was a whim – (I am the slave of such caprices) – seized me to learn how you came among the Jesuit brothers, and why you left them.'

'I thought I had told you why myself,' said the youth proudly.

'So you had; but I am one of those who can only build on the foundation their own hands have laid, and so I went myself to learn your history.'

'And has the journey rewarded your exertions?' said the boy, half mockingly.

A sudden start, and a look of almost savage ferocity on Gabriel's features, made Gerald tremble for his own rashness; and then, with a measured voice, he repeated the boy's words:

'The journey *has* rewarded my exertions.'

'May I venture to ask what you have discovered?' said Gerald timidly.

'I went to satisfy my own curiosity, not yours, boy. What I have learned may suffice for the one, and not for the other. Here comes Pippo with pleasanter tidings than all this gossip,' said he, rising, and entering the house.

'Won't you come in and have a bit of supper with us, Gerald?' asked Pippo kindly.

'No, I cannot eat,' said the boy, as he wiped the tears from his eyes.

'Come and taste a glass of the generous Orvieto, however.'

'No, Pippo; I could not swallow it,' said he, in a half-choking voice.

'Ah!' muttered the old man with a sigh, 'Signor Gabriel's talk rarely makes one relish the meal they wait for,' and with bent-down head he re-entered the house.

The feeling Gerald had long experienced toward Gabriel was one of fear, almost verging upon terror. There was about the man's look, his voice, his manner, something that portended danger. Do what he would, the boy never could make his sense of gratitude rise superior to his fear. He tried, over and over again, to think of him only as one who had saved his life, and to whom he owed all the present comforts he enjoyed; but above these thoughts there triumphed a terrible dread of the man, and a strange, mysterious belief that he possessed a sort of control over his destiny.

'If it were indeed so,' muttered he to himself, 'and that his shadow were to be over me through life, I 'd curse the day he carried me from the shore of the Lagoscuro!'

Night was rapidly closing in, and the dreary landscape was every moment growing sadder and drearier. As the sun sank beneath the hills the heavy exhalations began to well up from the damp earth, till a bluish haze of vapour rested over the plains and even partly up the mountain side. An odour, oppressive and sickening, accompanied this mist, which embarrassed the respiration, and made the senses dull and weary; and yet there sat Gerald, drinking in these noxious influences, careless of his fate, and half triumphing in his own indifference as to life. A drowsy stupor was rapidly gaining on him, when he felt his arm violently shaken, and, looking up, saw Gabriel at his side. In a gruff, rude voice, he chided him for his imprudence, and told him to go in.

'Isn't my life, at least, my own?' said Gerald boldly.

'That it is not,' said the other. 'Your priestly teachers might have told you that you hold it in trust for Him who gave it. I, and men like me, would say that each of us here has his allotted task to do in life; and that he is but a coward, or as bad as a coward, who skulks his share of it. Go in, I say, boy.'

Gerald obeyed without a word; and now a slavish sense of fear came over him, and he felt that this man swayed and controlled him as he pleased.

'There, Gerald, drink that,' said Gabriel, filling him out a goblet of red wine. 'That's the liquor inspires the pious sentiments of the Bishop of Orvieto. From that generous grape-juice spring his

Christian charities and his heavenly precepts. Let us see what miracles it can work upon two such sinful mortals as you and me. Well done, boy; drain off another,' and he refilled his glass as he spoke.

Old Pippo had retired and left them alone together. The moon was slowly rising beyond the lake, and threw a long yellow stream upon the floor, the only light in the chamber where they sat, thus giving a sort of solemnity to a moment when each felt too deeply sunk in his own thoughts for much conversation.

'Do you remark how that streak of moonlight seems to separate us, Gerald?' said Gabriel. 'A superstitious mind would find food for speculation there, and trace some mysterious meaning – perhaps a warning – from it. Are you superstitious?'

'I can scarcely say I am not,' said the boy diffidently.

'None of us are,' said the other boldly. 'If we affect to despise spirits we are just as eager slaves of our own presentiments. What we dignify by the name of reason is just as often a mere prompting of instinct. It amuses us to believe that we steer the bark of our destiny; but the truth comes upon us at last, that the tiller was lashed when the voyage began.' After a long silence on both sides, Gabriel said: 'I have told you, Gerald, that I made a journey to Rome on your account. I have been to the Jesuit College; conversed with the superior; saw your cell, your torn school-books, your little table carved over with your pen-knife; and, by a date scratched on a window-pane, was led to discover where you had passed the evening of the fifth of January.'

'And did you go *there* also?' asked Gerald eagerly.

'Ay, boy. I gave an afternoon to the Altieri and the café in front of it.'

'You saw the Count, then?'

'No, I have not seen him,' said Gabriel dryly. 'He was away from Rome at a villa, I believe; but I have learned that, indignant at your flight from the Cardinal's villa, he absolves himself of all further interest in you.'

'Have you seen Fra Luke?' asked the boy, who now talked as if the other had known every incident of his life.

'No; he too was away. In fact, Gerald, there was little to learn, and I came back very nearly as I went. I only know that you are about as much alone in the world as myself. We are meet companions. You said, a while ago, you were curious to know who and what I was. You shall hear. I am of a good Provençal family, originally derived from Italy. We are counts, from a date before the Medici; so much for blood. As to fortune, my grandfather was rich, and my own father enjoyed a reasonable fortune. I was, however, brought up to believe all men my brothers; all interested alike in serving and aiding each other: helping in the cause of that excellent thing we are pleased to call Humanity; and as a creed firmly believing that, bating a chance yielding to temptation, a little backsliding now and then on the score of an evil passion, men and women were wonderfully good, and were on the road to be better. We were most ingenious in our devices to build up this belief. My father wrote books and delivered lectures to prove it. He did more: he squandered all his patrimony in support of his theory, and he trained me up to be – what I am.' And the last words were uttered in a voice of intense solemnity.

'I am not going to give you a story of my life,' said he, after some time; 'I mean only to let you hear its moral. Till I was eighteen I was taught to believe that men were honest, truthful, brave, and affectionate; and that women were pure-hearted, gentle, forgiving, and trustful. Before I was nineteen I knew men to be scoundrels; it took me about a year more to think worse of the others. Then began my real life. I ceased to be a dupe, and felt a man. I am a quick learner, and I acquired their vices rapidly, all but one, that is still my stumbling-block – hypocrisy. All that I have done,' said he, in half soliloquy, 'might have passed harmlessly had I known but how to shroud it. Slander, theft, and seduction must not walk naked in this well-dressed world; but, with fine clothes on, they make very good company. I was curious to see if other lands were the same slaves of conventionalities, and I travelled. I went to Holland and to England; I found both as bad – nay worse – than France. If I

obtained a momentary success in life I was certain to be robbed of it by some allegation foreign to the question. My book was clever; but I had deserted my wife. My treatise was admirable; but I had seduced the daughter of my protector. My views were just, right-minded, and true; but I had robbed my father. Thus, with a subtlety the stupidest possess, they were able to detract from my genius by charging it with the defects of my character, as if it behoved one to pay the debts of the other. I went on insisting that it was my opinions alone were before the world; they as steadily persisted in dragging myself there. At last they have had their will, and I wish them joy of the victory.' There was a savage triumph in his eyes as he spoke this that made Gerald tremble while he looked at him.

'If you care for my story, boy,' resumed he, 'old Pippo there will give it to you for a flask of Monte Pulciano. He 'll tell you of all my cruelties in my first campaign in Corsica; how I won my wife by first blasting her reputation; how I left her; how I was imprisoned and fined, and how escaped from both by a seduction. If he forget the name, you may remind him of Sophie De Mounier. They beheaded me in effigy for this at Dole. But why go on with vulgar incidents which have happened to so many! It is the moral of it all I would impress, boy, which is this – take nothing from the world but solid gifts. Laugh at its praises, and drink deep of its indulgences! Those born great are able to do this by prerogative; you and I may succeed to it by skill. Remember, too, that my theory is a wide, a most catholic one; and to follow it you need assume no special discipline, but be priest, soldier, statesman, scholar, just as you will. I have been all these in turn, and may be so again; but whether I wear a cassock or a cuirass, my knowledge of men will guide me to but one mode of dealing with them.'

'There is nothing in what you have told me of your life to make me revere your principles,' said Gerald, with a courageous boldness.

'Because I have told you how I fell, and not how I was tempted; because I have stooped to say of myself that which none dare say to my face; because whatever I have been to the world it was that same world fashioned me to. What would it avail me that I made out a case of undeserving hardships and injustice, proved myself an injured, martyred saint: would your wondering sympathy heal any the least of those wounds that fester here, boy? Every man's course in life is but one swing of the pendulum. I have vowed that with mine I shall cleave the dense mob and scatter the vile multitude. As to you,' said he, suddenly turning his glaring eyes upon the youth, 'you are free to leave this to-morrow. I'll take care that you are safely restored to those you came from, if you wish to return. If you prefer it, you may remain here for a month or two; by that time I shall return.'

'Are you going, then, from this?' asked Gerald.

'Yes. I am on my trial at Aix, for cruelty and desertion of my wife. They have spread a report that I have no intention to appear; that, having fled France, I mean never to return to it. Ere the week's over they shall learn their mistake. I shall be there before them; and, if instances from the uses of court and courtiers are admissible, show, that when they prove me guilty, they must be ready to include Versailles in the next prosecution. Watch this case, boy; I'll send you the newspapers daily. Watch it closely, and you 'll see that the file is at work noiselessly now, but still at work on those old fetters that have bound mankind so long. But first say if you desire to stay here.'

Gerald held down his head and muttered a half audible 'Yes.'

'To-night, then, I will jot down the names of certain books you ought to read. I shall leave you many others too, and take your choice among them. Read and think, and, if you are able, write too: I care not on what theme, so the thoughts be your own.'

Gerald wished to thank him, but even gratitude could not surmount the dread he felt for him. Gabriel saw the struggle that was engaged in the boy's heart, and, smiling half sadly, said, 'To our next meeting, lad!'

CHAPTER XI. LAST DAYS AT THE TANA

If Gerald breathed more freely the next morning, on hearing that Signor Gabriel had departed, it is, perhaps, no great wonder. The Tana was not a very agreeable abode. Dreariness within doors and without, a poverty unredeemed by that graceful content which so often sheds its influence over humble fortune, a wearisome round of life – these were the characteristics of a spot which, in a manner, was associated in his mind with all the sufferings of a sickbed. Yet no sooner had he learned that Gabriel was gone, than he felt as if a load were removed from his heart, and that even by the shores of that gloomy lake, or on the sides of those barren hills, he might now indulge his own teeming fancies, and live in a world of his own thoughts.

It was no common terror that possessed him; his studies as a child had stored his memory with many a dreadful story of satanic temptation. One in particular he remembered well, of St. Francis, who, accompanied by a chance traveller, had made a journey of several days; but whenever the saint, passing some holy shrine or sacred spot, would kneel to pray, the most terrible blasphemies would issue from his lips instead of prayer; for his fellow-traveller was the Evil One himself. What if Gabriel had some horrible mission of this kind? There was enough in his look, his manner, and his conversation to warrant the belief. He half laughed when the thought first crossed his mind, but it came up again and again, gaining strength and consistency at each recurrence; nor was the melancholy desolation of the scene itself ill suited to aid the dreary conjecture. Though Gabriel had confided to him the key of his chamber where all his books were kept, Gerald passed days before he could summon resolution to enter it. A vague terror – a dread to which he could not give shape or form – arrested his steps, and he would turn away from the door and creep noiselessly down the stairs, as though afraid of confessing, even to himself, what his errand had been.

At last, ashamed of yielding to this childish fear, he took a moment when old Pippo and his niece were at work in the garden, to explore the long-dreaded chamber. The room was very different from what he had anticipated, and presented a degree of comfort singularly in contrast to the rest of the Tana. Maps and book-shelves covered the walls, with here and there prints, mostly portraits of celebrated actresses. A large table was littered with letters and papers, left just as Gabriel had quitted the spot. Great piles of manuscript, too, showed what laborious hours had been spent there, while books of reference were strewn about, the pages marked by pencil-notes and interlineations. All indicated a life of study and labour. One trait alone gave another and different impression; it was a long rapier that hung over the fire-place, around whose blade, at about a foot from the point, was tied a small bow of sky-blue ribbon. As, curious to divine the meaning of this, Gerald examined the weapon closely, he perceived that the steel was stained with blood up to the place where the ribbon was attached. What strange, wild fancies did not the boy weave as he gazed on this curious relic! Some fatal encounter there had been. Doubtless the unwiped blood upon that blade had once welled in a human heart. Some murderous hand had grasped that strong hilt, and some silk tresses had once been fastened with that blue band which now marked where the blade had ceased to penetrate. ‘A sad tale, surely, would it be to hear,’ said he, as he sat down in deep thought.

Tired of these musings, he turned to the objects on the table. The writings that were scattered about showed that almost every species of composition had engaged his pen. Essays on education, a history of the Illuminati, love-songs, a sketch of Cagliostroa, a paper on the commerce of the Scheldt, a life of Frederic, with portions of an unfinished novel, all indicated the habits of a daily labourer of literature; while passages selected from classic authorities, with great care and research, evinced that much pains had been expended in cultivating that rich intelligence.

The last work which had occupied his hand – it still lay open, with an unfinished sentence in the pen – was a memoir of the Pretender’s expedition in ‘45. The name of Charles Edward was like a spell to Gerald’s heart. From the earliest day he could remember he was taught to call him his own Prince,

and among the prayers his infant lips had syllabled, none were uttered with more intense devotion than for the return of that true and rightful sovereign to the land of his fathers. And now, how his eyes filled up, and his heart swelled, as a long-forgotten verse arose to his mind! He had learned it when its meaning was all mystery, but the clink of the rhythm had left it stored in his memory:

'Though for a time we see Whitehall
With cobwebs hanging on the wall,
Instead of gold and silver bright,
That glanced with splendour day and night,
With rich perfume
In every room,
That did delight that princely train,
These again shall be,
When the time we see,
That the king shall enjoy his own again.'

Heavy and hot were the tears that rolled down the youth's cheeks, for he was thinking of home and long ago – of that far-away home where loving hearts had clustered round him. He could recall, too, the little room, the little bed he slept in, and he pondered over his strange, forlorn destiny. And yet, thought he suddenly, 'What is there in my fate equal to that poor Prince's? I am a Géraldine, they say, but I have none to own or acknowledge me. Who knows in what condition of shame I came into the world, since none will call me theirs? This noble name is little better than a scoff upon me.' The boy's heart felt bursting at this sad retrospect of his lot. 'Would that I had never left the college!' cried he in his misery. 'Another year or two had, doubtless, calmed down the rebellious longings of my heart for a life of action, and then I should have followed my calling humbly, calmly, perhaps contentedly.'

Partly to divert his thoughts from this theme, he turned to the memoir of the Prince's expedition, and soon became so deeply interested in its details as to forget himself and his own sorrows. Brief and sketchy as the narrative was, it displayed in all the warm colouring of a romance that glorious outburst of national chivalry which gathered the chieftains around their sovereign – all the graces, too, of his own captivating manner, his handsome person, his courtly address, were dwelt upon, exerting as they did an almost magical influence upon every one who came before him. The short and bloody struggle which began at Preston and ended at Culloden was before his eyes, with all its errors exposed, all its mistakes displayed; every fault of strategy dwelt upon, and every miscalculation criticised. All the train of events which might have occurred had this or that policy been adopted was set forth in most persuasive form; till, when the youth arose from the perusal, such a conviction was forced upon him that rashness alone had defeated the enterprise, that he sprang to his feet, and paced the room in passionate indignation. As he thought over the noble devotion of Charles Edward's followers, he felt as if such a cause could not die. 'The right is there,' muttered he, 'and there must yet be brave men who think so. It cannot, surely, be possible that for one defeat so great a claim could be abandoned for ever! Where is the Prince now? how is he occupied? who are his adherents and counsellors?' were the questions which quickly succeeded each other in his mind. 'Would I were a soldier, that I could lay my services at his feet, or that I had skill or ability to aid his cause in any way!'

He turned eagerly again to the memoir, whose concluding words were, 'He landed once more in France, on the 20th of September.' 'And that is now many a year ago,' said he, and with a dreary sigh; 'mayhap, of his wrecked fortune, not a plank now remains. Who could guide me in this matter – who advise me? 'He knew of but one, and yet he shuddered at the idea of seeking counsel from Gabriel. The more Gerald reflected on it, the more was he assured that if he could obtain access to the Prince, his Royal Highness would remember his name. 'It is impossible,' thought he, 'but that some of my family must have been engaged in his cause, or why should I, as a mere child, have been taught

to pray each night for his success, and ask for a blessing on his head?' Yearning as his heart was for some high purpose in life, it sent a thrill of intense delight through him to think of such a destiny.

It was a part of the training in the Jesuit College, to induce the youth to select some saintly model for imitation in life, and while some chose St. Francis Xavier, or St. Vincent de Paul, others took St. Anthony of Padua, St. Francis d'Assisi, or any other illustrious martyr of the faith; each votary being from the hour of his selection a most strenuous upholder of the patron he assumed. Indeed, of the enthusiasm in this respect some strange and almost incredible stories ran, showing how, in their zeal, many had actually submitted to most painful self-tortures, to resemble the idols of their ambition. How easy was it now for Gerald to replace any of these grim saints and martyrs by an image that actually filled his whole heart – one who possessed every graceful attribute and every attractive quality. The seed of hero-worship thus sown in his nature ripened to a harvest very different from that it was intended to bear, and Charles Edward occupied the shrine some pious martyr should have held. He little knew, indeed, how easily affections, nurtured for one class of objects, are transferred to others totally unlike them, and how often are the temples we rear and mean to dedicate to our highest and holiest aspirations made homes for most worldly passions! And what a strange chaos did that poor boy's mind soon become! for now he read whole days, and almost whole nights long, hurrying from his meals back to that lonely chamber, where he loved to be. With the insatiable thirst for new acquirement he tasted of all about him: dramatists, historians, essay-writers, theologians; the wildest theories of the rights of man, the most uncompromising asserters of divine authority for royalty, the sufferings and sorrows of noble-hearted missionaries, the licentious lives of courtly debauchees – all poured in like a strong flood over the soil of his mind, enriching, corrupting, ennobling, and debasing it by turns. Like some great edifice reared without plan, his mind displayed the strangest and most opposite combinations, and thus the noble eloquence of Massillon, the wit of Molière, the epigrammatic pungency of Pascal, blended themselves with the caustic severity of Voltaire, the touching pathos of Rousseau, and the knowledge of life so eminently the gift of Le Sage. To see that world of which these great men presented such a picture, became now his all-absorbing passion. To mingle with his fellow-men as actor, and not spectator. To be one of that immense *dramatis persono* who moved about the stage of life, seemed enough for all ambition. The strong spirit of adventure lay deeply in his heart, and he felt a kind of pride to think that if any future success was to greet him, he could recall the days at the Tana, and say, there never was one who started in life poorer or more friendless.

There was no exaggeration in this. His clothes were rags, his shoes barely held together, and the only covering he had for his head was the little skullcap he used to wear in school hours. Even old Pippo began to scoff at his miserable appearance, and hinted a hope, that before the season of the contraband begun Gerald would have taken his departure, or be able to make a more respectable figure. As Gabriel had now been gone many weeks, and no tidings whatever come of him, the old man's reserve and deference daily decreased. He grumbled at Gerald's habits of study, profitless and idle as they seemed to him, while there was many a thing to be done about the house and the garden. He was not weak or sickly now: he could help to chop the wood for winter firing; he could raise those heavy water-buckets that swung over the deep well in the garden; he could draw the net in the little stream behind the house, or trench about the few stunted olives that struggled for life on the hillside. Gerald would willingly have done any or all of these, if the idea had occurred to himself. He was not indolent by nature, and liked the very fact of active occupation. As a task, however, he rejected the notion at once. It savoured of servitude to his mind, and who was this same Pippo who aspired to be his master?

The more the boy's mind became stored with knowledge, the fuller his intelligence grew of great examples and noble instances – the more indignantly did he repulse the advances of Pippo's companionship. 'What!' he would mutter to himself, 'leave Bossuet and his divine teachings for his coarse converse! Quit the sarcastic intensity of Voltaire's ridicule for the vulgar jests of this illiterate

boor! Exchange the glorious company of wits and sages, and poets and moralists, for a life of daily drudgery, with a mean peasant to talk to! Besides, I am not his guest, nor a burden upon his charity. It is to Gabriel I owe my shelter here.'

When driven by many a sarcasm to assume this position, Pippo gravely remarked: 'True enough, boy, so long as he was here; but he is gone now, and who 'll tell us will he ever come back? He may have been sentenced by the tribunal. At the hour we are talking here he may be in prison – at the galleys, for aught we know; and I promise you one thing, there's many a better man there.'

'And I, too, promise one thing,' replied Gerald angrily, 'if he ever do come, he shall hear how you have dared to speak of him.'

Old Pippo started at the words, and his face became lividly pale, and muttering a few words beneath his breath, he left the spot. Nothing was further from Gerald's mind than any defence of Gabriel, for whom, do what he might, he could feel neither affection nor gratitude. In what he had said he merely yielded to a momentary impatience to sting the old man by an angry reply. For the remainder of that day not a word was exchanged between them. They met and parted without saluting; they sat silently opposite each other at their meals. The following day opened with the same cold distance between them, the old man barely eyeing Gerald, when the youth was not observing him, and casting toward him glances of doubtful meaning. Too deeply engaged in his books to pay much attention to these signs of displeasure, Gerald passed his hours as usual in Gabriel's room.

He was seated, reading, when the door opened gently, and the old man's niece entered: her step was so noiseless, that she was nearly beside Gerald's chair before he noticed her.

'What is it, Tina,' said he, starting; 'what makes you look so frightened?'

She placed her finger on her lip, a sign of caution, and looked anxiously around her.

'He has not been cruel or angry with you, poor girl?' asked the boy; 'tell me this.'

'No, Gerald,' said she, in a low and broken voice; 'but there is danger over you – ay, and near too, if you can't escape it. He sent me last night over to St. Stephano, twelve weary miles across the mountain, after nightfall, to fetch the Gobbino – '

'The Gobbino – who is he?'

'The hunch-back, that was at the galleys in Messina,' said the girl, trembling all over; and then went on, 'and to tell him to come over to the Tana, for he wanted him.'

'Well, and then – '

'And then,' muttered the girl, 'and then,' and she made a pantomimic gesture of drawing a knife suddenly across the throat. 'It is so with him, they say; he 'd think no more of it than do I of killing a hen!'

'No, no, Tina,' said the boy, smiling at her fears. 'You wrong old Pippo and the Gobbo too. Take my word for it, there is something else he wants him for; besides, why should he dislike *me*? What have I done to provoke such a vengeance?'

'Haven't you threatened him?' said the girl eagerly. 'Have you not said that when Signor Gabriel comes back you will tell him something Pippo said of him?' Is that not enough? Is the Signor Gabriel one who ever forgives an injury?'

'I 'll not believe, I can't believe it,' said Gerald musingly.

'But I tell you it is true; I tell you I know it,' cried the girl passionately.

'But what am I to do, then? How can I defend myself," 'Fly – leave this – get over to Bolseno, or cross the frontier; neither of them can follow you into Tuscany.'

'Remember, Tina, I have no money. I am almost naked. I know no one.'

'What matters all that if you have life?' said she boldly.

'Well said, girl!' cried he, warmed by the same daring spirit that prompted her words. A slight noise in the garden underneath the window startled Tina, and she stepped quietly from the room and closed the door.

It was some time before Gerald could thoroughly take in the full force of the emergency that threatened him. He knew well that in the Italian nature the sentiment of vengeance occupies no low nor ignominious place, but is classed among high and generous qualities; and that he who submits tamely to an injury is infinitely meaner than the man who, at any cost of treachery, exacts his revenge for it.

That a terrible vengeance was often exacted for some casual slight, even a random word, the youth well knew. These were the points of honour in that strange national character of which, even to this hour, we know less than of any people's in Europe; and certainly, no crime could promise an easier accomplishment or less chance of discovery. 'Who is ever to *know* if I sunk under the Maremma fever,' said he, 'and who to *care*?'

He gazed out upon the lonesome waste of mountain and the black and stagnant lake at its foot, and thought the spot, at least, was well chosen for such an incident. If there were moments in which the dread of a terrible fate chilled his blood and made his heart cold with fear, there were others in which the sense of peril rallied and excited him. The stirring incidents of his readings were full of suchlike adventures, and he felt a sort of heroism in seeing himself thus summoned to meet an emergency. 'With this good rapier,' said he, taking down Gabriel's sword from its place, 'methinks I might offer a stout resistance. That blade, if I mistake not, already knows the way to a man's heart,' and he flourished the weapon so as to throw himself into an attitude of defence. Too much excited to read, except by snatches, he imagined to his own mind every possible species of attack that might be made upon him. He knew that a fair fight would never enter into *their* thoughts; that even before the fate reserved for him would come the plan for their own security; and so he pictured the various ways in which he might be taken unawares and disposed of without even a chance of reprisal. As night drew near his anxieties increased. The book in which from time to time he had been reading was the *Life of Benvenuto Cellini*, an autobiography filled with the wildest incidents of personal encounter, and well suited to call up ideas of conflict and peril. Not less, however, was it calculated to suggest notions of daring and defiance; for in every perilous strait and hair-breadth emergency the great Florentine displayed the noblest traits of calm and reasoning courage. 'They shall not do it without cost,' said Gerald, as he stole up noiselessly to his room, never appearing at the supper-table, but retiring to concert his future steps. Gerald's first care on entering his room was to search it thoroughly, though there was not a corner nor a cupboard capable of concealing a child. He went through the process of investigation with all the diligence his readings prompted. He sounded the walls for secret panels, and the floor for trapdoors; but all was so far safe. He next proceeded to barricade his door with chairs; not, indeed, to prevent an entrance, but arrayed so skilfully that they must topple down at the least touch, and thus apprise him of his peril if sleeping. He then trimmed and replenished his lamp, and with his trusty rapier at his side, lay down, all dressed as he was, to await what might happen.

He who has experienced in life what it is to lie watching for the dawn of a day full of Heaven-knows-what fatalities, patiently expecting the sun to rise upon what may prove his saddest, his last hour of existence, even he, however, will fall short of imagining the intense anxiety of one who with aching ears watches for the slightest sound, the lightest footfall, or the lowest word that may betoken the approach of danger. With the intensity of the emotion the senses become preternaturally acute, and the brain, overcharged with thought, suggests the wildest and strangest combinations. Through Gerald's mind, too, Cellini's daring adventures were passing. The dark and narrow streets of old Florence; the muffled 'sbirri' crowding in the dim doorways; the stealthy footsteps heard and lost again; the sudden clash of swords and the cries of combat; the shouts for succour, and the heavy plash into the dark waters of the Arno, all filled his waking, ay, and his dreamy thoughts, for he fell asleep at last and slept soundly. The day was just breaking, a grey, half-pinkish light faintly struggling through his window, when Gerald started up from his sleep. He had surely heard a sound. It was his name was called. Was it a human voice that uttered it? or was the warning from a more solemn world? He bent down his head to listen again; and now he distinctly heard a low, creaking sound, and as distinctly

saw that the door was slightly moved, and then the words ‘Gerald, Gerald,’ whispered. He arose at once, and quickly recognising Tina’s voice, drew nigh the door.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.