

A ROMAN SINGER.

XIII.

I WENT to Palestrina because all foreigners go there, and are to be heard of from other parts of the mountains in that place. It was a long and tiresome journey; the jolting stagecoach shook me very much. There was a stout woman inside, with a baby that squealed; there was a very dirty old country curate, who looked as though he had not shaved for a week, or changed his collar for a month. But he talked intelligently, though he talked too much, and he helped to pass the time until I was weary of him. We jolted along over the dusty roads, and were at least thankful that it was not yet hot.

In the evening we reached Palestrina, and stopped before the inn in the market-place, as tired and dusty as might be. The woman went one way, and the priest the other, and I was left alone. I soon found the fat old host, and engaged a room for the night. He was talkative and curious, and sat by my side when he had prepared my supper in the dingy dining-room down-stairs. I felt quite sure that he would be able to tell me what I wanted, or at least to give me a hint from hearsay. But he at once began to talk of last year, and how much better his business had been then than it was now, as country landlords invariably do.

It was to no purpose that I questioned him about the people that had passed during the fortnight, the month, the two months, back; it was clear that no one of the importance of my friends had been heard of. At last I was tired, and he lit a wax candle, which he would carefully charge in the bill afterwards, at double its natural price, and he showed me the way to my room. It was a very decent little room, with

white curtains and a good bed and a table, — everything I could desire. A storm had come up since I had been at my supper, and it seemed a comfortable thing to go to bed, although I was disappointed at having got no news.

But when I had blown out my candle, determining to expostulate with the host in the morning, if he attempted to make me pay for a whole one, I lay thinking of what I should do; and turning on my side, I observed that a narrow crack of the door admitted rays of light into the darkness of my chamber. Now I am very sensitive to draughts and inclined to take cold, and the idea that there was a door open troubled me, so that at last I made up my mind to get up and close it. As I rose to my feet, I perceived that it was not the door by which I had entered; and so, before shutting it, I called out, supposing there might be some one in the next room.

"Excuse me," I said loudly, "I will shut this door." But there was no reply.

Curiosity is perhaps a vice, but it is a natural one. Instead of pulling the door to its place, I pushed it a little, knocking with my knuckles at the same time. But as no one answered, I pushed it further, and put in my head. It was a disagreeable thing I saw.

The room was like mine in every way, save that the bed was moved to the middle of the open space, and there were two candles on two tables. On the bed lay a dead man. I felt what we call a brivido, — a shiver like an ague.

It was the body of an old man, with a face like yellow wax, and a singularly unpleasant expression even in death. His emaciated hands were crossed on his breast, and held a small black crucifix. The candles stood, one at the head and one at the foot, on little tables. I entered the room and looked long at the

dead old man. I thought it strange that there should be no one to watch him, but I am not afraid of dead men, after the first shudder is past. It was a ghastly sight enough, however, and the candles shed a glaring, yellowish light over it all.

"Poor wretch," I said to myself, and went back to my room, closing the door carefully behind me.

At first I thought of rousing the host, and explaining to him my objections to being left almost in the same room with a corpse. But I reflected that it would be foolish to seem afraid of it, when I was really not at all timid, and so I went to bed, and slept until dawn. But when I went down-stairs I found the innkeeper, and gave him a piece of my mind.

"What sort of an inn do you keep? What manners are these?" I cried angrily. "What diavolo put into your pumpkin head to give me a sepulchre for a room?"

He seemed much disturbed at what I said, and broke out into a thousand apologies. But I was not to be so easily pacified.

"Do you think," I demanded, "that I will ever come here again, or advise any of my friends to come here? It is insufferable. I will write to the police" — But at this he began to shed tears and to wring his hands, saying it was not his fault.

"You see, signore, it was my wife who made me arrange it so. Oh! these women — the devil has made them all! It was her father — the old dead man you saw. He died yesterday morning, — may he rest! — and we will bury him to-day. You see every one knows that unless a dead man is watched by some one from another town his soul will not rest in peace. My wife's father was a jettatore; he had the evil eye, and people knew it for miles around, so I could not persuade any one from the other villages to sit by him and watch his body,

though I sent everywhere all day yesterday. At last that wife of mine — maledictions on her folly! — said, 'It is my father, after all, and his soul must rest, at any price. If you put a traveler in the next room, and leave the door open, it will be the same thing; and so he will be in peace.' That is the way it happened, signore," he continued, after wiping away his tears; "you see I could not help it at all. But if you will overlook it, I will not make any charges for your stay. My wife shall pay me. She has poultry by the hundred. I will pay myself with her chickens."

"Very good," said I, well pleased at having got so cheap a lodging. "But I am a just man, and I will pay for what I have eaten and drunk, and you can take the night's lodging out of your wife's chickens, as you say." So we were both satisfied.¹

The storm of the night had passed away, leaving everything wet and the air cool and fresh. I wrapped my cloak about me, and went into the market-place, to see if I could pick up any news. It was already late, for the country, and there were few people about. Here and there, in the streets, a wine-cart was halting on its way to Rome, while the rough carter went through the usual arrangement of exchanging some of his employer's wine for food for himself, filling up the barrel with good pure water, that never hurt any one. I wandered about, though I could not expect to see any face that I knew; it is so many years since I lived at Serveti, that even were the carters from my old place, I should have forgotten how they looked. Suddenly, at the corner of a dirty street, where there was a little blue and white shrine to the Madonna, I stumbled against a burly fellow with a gray beard, carrying a bit of salt codfish in one hand and a cake of corn bread in the other, eating as he went.

¹ This incident actually occurred, precisely as related. — F. M. C.

"Gigi!" I cried in delight, when I recognized the old carrettiere who used to bring me grapes and wine, and still does when the fancy takes him.

"Dio mio! Signor Conte!" he cried with his mouth full, and holding up the bread and fish with his two hands, in astonishment. When he recovered himself, he instantly offered to share his meal with me, as the poorest wretch in Italy will offer his crust to the greatest prince, out of politeness. "Vuol favorire?" he said, smiling.

I thanked him and declined, as you may imagine. Then I asked him how he came to be in Palestrina; and he told me that he was often there in the winter, as his sister had married a vinedresser of the place, of whom he bought wine occasionally. Very well-to-do people, he explained eagerly, proud of his prosperous relations.

We clambered along through the rough street together, and I asked him what was the news from Serveti and from that part of the country, well knowing that if he had heard of any rich foreigners in that neighborhood he would at once tell me of it. But I had not much hope. He talked about the prospects of the vines, and such things, for some time, and I listened patiently.

"By the bye," he said at last, "there is a gran signore who is gone to live in Fillettino, — a crazy man, they say, with a beautiful daughter, but really beautiful, as an angel."

I was so much surprised that I made a loud exclamation.

"What is the matter?" asked Gigi.

"It is nothing, Gigi," I answered, for I was afraid lest he should betray my secret, if I let him guess it. "It is nothing. I struck my foot against a stone. But you were telling about a foreigner who is gone to live somewhere. Fillettino? Where is that?"

"Oh, the place of the diavolo! I do not wonder you do not know, conte, for gentlemen never go there. It is in

the Abruzzi, beyond Trevi. Did you ever hear of the Serra di Sant' Antonio, where so many people have been killed?"

"Diana! I should think so! In the old days" —

"Bene," said Gigi, "Fillettino is there, at the beginning of the pass."

"Tell me, Gigi mio," I said, "are you not very thirsty?" The way to the heart of the wine carter lies through a pint measure. Gigi was thirsty, as I supposed, and we sat down in the porch of my inn, and the host brought a stoup of his best wine and set it before us.

"I would like to hear about the crazy foreigner who is gone to live in the hills among the briganti," I said, when he had wet his throat.

"What I know I will tell you, Signor Conte," he answered, filling his pipe with bits that he broke off a cigar. "But I know very little. He must be a foreigner, because he goes to such a place; and he is certainly crazy, for he shuts his daughter in the old castle, and watches her as though she was made of wax, like the flowers you have in Rome under glass."

"How long have they been there, these queer folks?" I asked.

"What do I know? It may be a month or two. A man told me, who had come that way from Fucino, and that is all I know."

"Do people often travel that way, Gigi?"

"Not often, indeed," he answered, with a grin. "They are not very civil, the people of those parts." Gigi made a gesture, or a series of gestures. He put up his hands as though firing a gun. Then he opened his right hand and closed it, with a kind of insinuating twirl of the fingers, which means "to steal." Lastly he put his hand over his eyes, and looked through his fingers as though they were bars, which means "prison." From this I inferred that the inhabitants of Fillettino were ad-

dicted to murder, robbery, and other pastimes, for which they sometimes got into trouble. The place he spoke of is about thirty miles, or something more, from Palestrina, and I began planning how I should get there as cheaply as possible. I had never been there, and wondered what kind of a habitation the count had found; for I knew it must be the roughest sort of mountain town, with some dilapidated castle, or other, overhanging it. But the count was rich, and he had doubtless made himself very comfortable. I sat in silence, while Gigi finished his wine, and chatted about his affairs between the whiffs of his pipe.

"Gigi," I said at last, "I want to buy a donkey."

"Eh, your excellency can be accommodated; and a saddle, too, if you wish."

"I think I could ride without a saddle," I said, for I thought it a needless piece of extravagance.

"*Madonna mia!*" he cried. "The Signor Conte ride bareback on a donkey! They would laugh at you. But my brother-in-law can sell you a beast this very day, and for a mere song."

"Let us go and see the beast," I said. I felt a little ashamed of having wished to ride without a saddle. But as I had sold all I had, I wanted to make the money last as long as possible; or at least I would spend as little as I could, and take something back, if I ever went home at all. We had not far to go, and Gigi opened a door in the street, and showed me a stable, in which something moved in the darkness. Presently he led out an animal and began to descant upon its merits.

"Did you ever see a more beautiful donkey?" asked Gigi admiringly. "It looks like a horse!" It was a little ass, with sad eyes, and ears as long as its tail. It was also very thin, and had the hair rubbed off its back from carrying burdens. But it had no sore places, and did not seem lame.

"He is full of fire," said Gigi, poking the donkey in the ribs to excite a show of animation. "You should see him gallop up hill with my brother on his back, and a good load into the bargain. Brrrr! Stand still, will you!" he cried, holding tight by the halter, though the animal did not seem anxious to run away.

"And then," said Gigi, "he eats nothing, — positively nothing."

"He does not look as though he had eaten much of late," I said.

"Oh, my brother-in-law is as good to him as though he were a Christian. He gives him corn bread and fish, just like his own children. But this ass prefers straw."

"A frugal ass," I said, and we began to bargain. I will not tell you what I gave Gigi's brother-in-law for the beast, because you would laugh. And I bought an old saddle, too. It was really necessary, but it was a dear bargain, though it was cheaper than hiring; for I sold the donkey and the saddle again, and got back something.

It is a wild country enough that lies behind the mountains towards the sources of the Aniene, — the river that makes the falls at Tivoli. You could not half understand how in these times, under the new government, and almost within a long day's ride from Rome, such things could take place as I am about to tell you of, unless I explained to you how very primitive that country is which lies to the southeast of the capital, and which we generally call the Abruzzi. The district is wholly mountainous, and though there are no very great elevations there are very ragged gorges and steep precipices, and now and then an inaccessible bit of forest far up among the rocks, which no man has ever thought of cutting down. It would be quite impossible to remove the timber. The people are mostly shepherds in the higher regions, where there are no vines, and when opportunity offers they will way-

lay the unwary traveler and rob him, and even murder him, without thinking very much about it. In the old days, the boundary between the Papal States and the kingdom of Naples ran through these mountains, and the contrabbandieri—the smugglers of all sorts of wares—used to cross from one dominion to the other by circuitous paths and steep ways of which only a few had knowledge. The better known of these passes were defended by soldiers and police, but there have been bloody fights fought, within a few years, between the law and its breakers. Foreigners never penetrate into the recesses of these hills, and even the English guide-books, which are said to contain an account of everything that the Buon Dio ever made, compiled from notes taken at the time of the creation, make no mention of places which surpass in beauty all the rest of Italy put together.

No railroad or other modern innovation penetrates into those Arcadian regions, where the goatherd plays upon his pipe all the day long, the picture of peace and innocence, or prowls in the passes with a murderous long gun, if there are foreigners in the air. The women toil at carrying their scant supply of drinking-water from great distances during a part of the day, and in the evening they spin industriously by their firesides or upon their doorsteps, as the season will have it. It is an old life, the same to-day as a thousand years ago, and perhaps as it will be a thousand years hence. The men are great travelers, and go to Rome in the winter to sell their cheese, or to milk a flock of goats in the street at daybreak, selling the foaming canful for a sou. But their visits to the city do not civilize them; the outing only broadens the horizon of their views in regard to foreigners, and makes them more ambitious to secure one, and see what he is like, and cut off his ears, and get his money. Do not suppose that the shepherd of the Abruzzi

lies all day on the rocks in the sun, waiting for the foreign gentleman to come within reach. He might wait a long time. Climbing has strengthened the muscles of his legs into so much steel, and a party of herdsmen have been known to come down from the Serra to the plains around Velletri, and to return to their inaccessible mountains, after doing daring deeds of violence, in twenty-four hours from the time of starting; covering at least from eighty to ninety miles by the way. They are extraordinary fellows, as active as tigers, and fabulously strong, though they are never very big.

This country begins behind the range of Sabine mountains seen from Rome across the Campagna, and the wild character of it increases as you go towards the southeast.

Since I have told you this much, I need not weary you with further descriptions. I do not like descriptions, and it is only when Nino gives me his impressions that I write them, in order that you may know how beautiful things impress him, and the better judge of his character.

I do not think that Gigi really cheated me so very badly about the donkey. Of course I do not believe the story of his carrying the brother-in-law and the heavy load uphill at a gallop; but I am thin and not very heavy, and the little ass carried me well enough through the valleys, and when we came to a steep place I would get off and walk, so as not to tire him too much. If he liked to crop a thistle or a blade of grass, I would stop a moment, for I thought he would grow fatter in that way, and I should not lose so much when I sold him again. But he never grew very fat.

Twice I slept by the way, before I reached the end of my journey,—once at Olevano, and once at Trevi; for the road from Olevano to Trevi is long, and some parts are very rough, especially at first. I could tell you just how every

stone on the road looks — Rojate, the narrow pass beyond, and then the long valley with the vines; then the road turns away and rises as you go along the plateau of Arcinazzo, which is hollow beneath, and you can hear the echoes as you tread; then at the end of that the desperate old inn, called by the shepherds the *Madre dei Briganti*, — the mother of brigands, — smoke-blackened within and without, standing alone on the desolate heath; further on, a broad bend of the valley to the left, and you see Trevi rising before you, crowned with an ancient castle, and overlooking the stream that becomes the Aniene afterwards; from Trevi through a rising valley that grows narrower at every step, and finally seems to end abruptly, as indeed it does, in a dense forest far up the pass. And just below the woods lies the town of Fillettino, where the road ends; for there is a road which leads to Tivoli, but does not communicate with Olevano, whence I had come.

Of course I had made an occasional inquiry by the way, when I could do so without making people too curious. When any one asked me where I was going, I would say I was bound for Fucino, to buy beans for seed at the wonderful model farm that Torlonia has made by draining the old lake. And then I would ask about the road; and sometimes I was told there was a strange foreigner at Fillettino, who made everybody wonder about him by his peculiar mode of life. Therefore, when I at last saw the town, I was quite sure that the count was there, and I got off my little donkey, and let him drink in the stream, while I myself drank a little higher up. The road was dusty, and my donkey and I were thirsty.

I thought of all I would do, as I sat on the stone by the water, and the beast cropped the wretched grass; and soon I came to the conclusion that I did not know in the least what I should do. I had unexpectedly found what I wanted,

very soon, and I was thankful enough to have been so lucky. But I had not the first conception of what course I was to pursue when once I had made sure of the count. Besides, it was barely possible that it was not he, after all, but another foreigner, with another daughter. The thought frightened me, but I drove it away. If it were really old Lira who had chosen this retreat in which to imprison his daughter and himself, I asked myself whether I could do anything, save send word to Nino as soon as possible.

I felt like a sort of Don Quixote, suddenly chilled into the prosaic requirements of common sense. Perhaps if Hedwig had been my *Dulcinea*, instead of Nino's, the crazy fit would have lasted, and I would have attempted to scale the castle wall and carry off the prize by force. There is no telling what a sober old professor of philosophy may not do, when he is crazy. But meanwhile I was sane. Graf von Lira had a right to live anywhere he pleased with his daughter, and the fact that I had discovered the spot where he pleased to live did not constitute an introduction. Or finally, if I got access to the old count, what had I to say to him? Ought I to make a formal request for Nino? I looked at my old clothes, and almost smiled.

But the weather was cold, though the roads were dusty; so I mounted my ass and jogged along, meditating deeply.

XIV.

Fillettino is a trifle cleaner than most towns of the same kind. Perhaps it rains more often, and there are fewer people. Considering that its vicinity has been the scene of robbery, murder, and all manner of adventurous crime from time immemorial, I had expected to find it a villainous place. It is nothing of the kind. There is a decent ap-

pearance about it that is surprising ; and though the houses are old and brown and poor, I did not see pigs in many rooms, nor did the little children beg of me, as they beg of every one elsewhere. The absence of the pigs struck me particularly, for in the Sabine towns they live in common with the family, and go out only in the daytime to pick up what they can get.

I went to the apothecary — there is always an apothecary in these places — and inquired for a lodging. Before very long I had secured a room, and it seemed that the people were accustomed to travelers, for it was surprisingly clean. The bed was so high that I could touch the ceiling when I sat on it, and the walls were covered with ornaments, such as glazed earthenware saints, each with a little basin for holy water, some old engravings of other saints, a few paper roses from the last fair, and a weather-beaten game pouch of leather. The window looked out over a kind of square, where a great quantity of water ran into a row of masonry tanks out of a number of iron pipes projecting from an overhanging rock. Above the rock was the castle, the place I had come to see, towering up against the darkening sky.

It is such a strange place that I ought to describe it to you, or you will not understand the things that happened there. There is a great rock, as I said, rising above the town, and upon this is built the feudal stronghold, so that the walls of the building do not begin less than forty feet from the street level. The height of the whole castle consequently seems enormous. The walls, for the most part, follow the lines of the gray rock, irregularly, as chance would have it, and the result is a three-cornered pile, having a high square tower at one angle, where also the building recedes some yards from the edge of the cliff, leaving on that side a broad terrace guarded by a stone parapet. On another side of the great isolated boulder

a narrow roadway heads up a steep incline, impracticable for carriages, but passable for four-footed beasts ; and this path gives access to the castle through a heavy gate opening upon a small court within. But the rock itself has been turned to account, and there are chambers within it, which formerly served as prisons, opening to the right and left of a narrow staircase, hewn out of the stone, and leading from the foot of the tower to the street below ; upon which it opens through a low square door, set in the rock and studded with heavy iron nails.

Below the castle hangs the town, and behind it rises the valley, thickly wooded with giant beech-trees. Of course I learned the details of the interior little by little, and I gathered also some interesting facts regarding the history of Fillettino, which are not in any way necessary to my story. The first thing I did was to find out what means of communication there were with Rome. There was a postal service twice a week, and I was told that Count von Lira, whose name was no secret in the village, sent messengers very often to Subiaco. The post left that very day, and I wrote to Nino to tell him that I had found his friends in villeggiatura at Fillettino, advising him to come as soon as he could, and recruit his health and his spirits.

I learned, further, from the woman who rented me my lodging, that there were other people in the castle besides the count and his daughter. At least, she had seen a tall gentleman on the terrace with them during the last two days ; and it was not true that the count kept Hedwig a prisoner. On the contrary, they rode out together almost every day, and yesterday the tall gentleman had gone with them. The woman also went into many details ; telling me how much money the count had spent in a fortnight, bringing furniture and a real piano and immense loads of baskets,

which the porters were told contained glass and crockery, and must be carefully handled. It was clear that the count was settled for some time. He had probably taken the old place for a year, by a lease from the Roman family to whom Fillettino and the neighboring estates belong. He would spend the spring and the summer there, at least.

Being anxious to see who the tall gentleman might be, of whom my landlady had spoken, I posted myself in the street, at the foot of the inclined bridle-path leading to the castle gate. I walked up and down for two hours, about the time I supposed they would all ride, hoping to catch a glimpse of the party. Neither the count nor his daughter knew me by sight, I was sure, and I felt quite safe. It was a long time to wait, but at last they appeared, and I confess that I nearly fell down against the wall when I saw them.

There they were on their horses, moving cautiously down the narrow way above me. First came the count, sitting in his saddle as though he were at the head of his old regiment, his great gray mustaches standing out fiercely from his severe, wooden face. Then came Hedwig, whom I had not seen for a long time, looking as white and sorrowful as the angel of death, in a close black dress, or habit, so that her golden hair was all the color there was to be seen about her.

But the third rider, — there was no mistaking that thin, erect figure, dressed in the affectation of youth; those fresh pink cheeks, with the snowy mustache, and the thick white hair showing beneath the jaunty hat; the eagle nose and the bright eyes. Baron Benoni, and no other.

My first instinct was to hide myself; but before I could retreat, Benoni recognized me, even with my old clothes. Perhaps they are not so much older than the others, compared with his fashionable garments. He made no sign as

the three rode by; only I could see by his eyes, that were fixed angrily upon me, that he knew me, and did not wish to show it. As for myself, I stood stock still in amazement.

I had supposed that Benoni had really gone to Austria, as he had told me he was about to do. I had thought him ignorant of the count's retreat, save for the hint which had so luckily led me straight to the mark. I had imagined him to be but a chance acquaintance of the Lira family, having little or no personal interest in their doings. Nevertheless, I had suspected him, as I have told you. Everything pointed to a deception on his part. He had evidently gone immediately from Rome to Fillettino. He must be intimate with the count, or the latter would not have invited him to share a retreat seemingly intended to be kept a secret. He also, I thought, must have some very strong reason for consenting to bury himself in the mountains in company with a father and daughter who could hardly be supposed to be on good terms with each other.

But again, why had he seemed so ready to help me and to forward Nino's suit? Why had he given me the smallest clue to the count's whereabouts? Now I am not a strong man in action, perhaps, but I am a very cunning reasoner. I remembered the man, and the outrageous opinions he had expressed, both to Nino and to me. Then I understood my suspicions. It would be folly to expect such a man to have any real sympathy or sense of friendship for any one. He had amused himself by promising to come back and go with me on my search, perhaps to make a laughing-stock of me, or even of my boy, by telling the story to the Liras afterwards. He had entertained no idea that I would go alone, or that, if I went, I could be successful. He had made a mistake, and was very angry; his eyes told me that. Then I made a bold resolution. I would

see him and ask him what he intended to do ; in short, why he had deceived me.

There would probably be no difficulty in the way of obtaining an interview. I was not known to the others of the party, and Benoni would scarcely refuse to receive me. I thought he would excuse himself, with ready cynicism, and pretend to continue his offers of friendship and assistance. I confess, I regretted that I was so humbly clad, in all my old clothes ; but after all, I was traveling, you know.

It was a bold resolution, I think, and I revolved the situation in my mind during two days, thinking over what I should say. But with all my thought I only found that everything must depend on Benoni's answer to my own question — " Why ? "

On the third day, I made myself look as fine as I could, and though my heart beat loudly as I mounted the bridle-path, I put on a bold look and rang the bell. It was a clanging thing, that seemed to creak on a hinge, as I pulled the stout string from outside. A man appeared, and on my inquiry said I might wait in the porch behind the great wooden gate, while he delivered my message to his excellency the baron. It seemed to take a long time, and I sat on a stone bench, eying the courtyard curiously from beneath the archway. It was sunny and clean, with an old well in the middle, but I could see nothing save a few windows opening upon it. At last, the man returned, and said that I might come with him.

I found Benoni, clad in a gorgeous dressing-gown, stalking up and down a large vaulted apartment, in which there were a few new armchairs, a table covered with books, and a quantity of ancient furniture, that looked unsteady and fragile, although it had been carefully dusted. A plain green baize carpet covered about half the floor, and the remainder was of red brick. The morning sun streamed in through tall win-

dows, and played in a rainbow-like effulgence on the baron's many colored dressing-gown, as he paused in his walk to greet me.

" Well, my friend," said Benoni gayly, " how in the name of the devil did you get here ? " I thought I had been right ; he was going to play at being my friend again.

" Very easily, by the help of your little hint," I replied ; and I seated myself, for I felt that I was master of the situation.

" Ah, if I had suspected you of being so intelligent, I would not have given you any hint at all. You see I have not been to Austria on business, but am here in this good old flesh of mine, such as it is."

" Consequently " — I began, and then stopped. I suddenly felt that Benoni had turned the tables upon me, I could not tell how.

" Consequently," said he, continuing my sentence, " when I told you that I was going to Austria I was lying."

" The frankness of the statement obliges me to believe that you are now telling the truth," I answered angrily. I felt uneasy. Benoni laughed in his peculiar way.

" Precisely," he continued again, " I was lying. I generally do, for so long as I am believed I deceive people ; and when they find me out, they are confused between truth and lying, so that they do not know what to believe at all. By the bye, I am wandering. I am sorry to see you here. I hope you understand that." He looked at me with the most cheerful expression. I believe I was beginning to be angry at his insulting calmness. I did not answer him.

" Signor Grandi," he said in a moment, seeing I was silent, " I am enchanted to see you, if you prefer that I should be. But may I imagine if I can do anything more for you, now that you have heard from my own lips that I am a liar ? I say it again, — I like the word,

— I am a liar, and I wish I were a better one. What can I do for you ? ”

“ Tell me why you have acted this comedy,” said I, recollecting at the right moment the gist of my reflections during the past two days.

“ Why ? To please myself, good sir ; for the sovereign pleasure of myself.”

“ I would surmise,” I retorted tartly, “ that it could not have been for the pleasure of any one else.”

“ Perhaps you mean, because no one else could be base enough to take pleasure in what amuses me ? ” I nodded savagely at his question. “ Very good. Knowing this of me, do you further surmise that I should be so simple as to tell you how I propose to amuse myself in the future ? ” I recognized the truth of this, and I saw myself checkmated at the outset. I therefore smiled, and endeavored to seem completely satisfied, hoping that his vanity would betray him into some hint of the future. He seemed to have before taken pleasure in misleading me with a fragment of truth, supposing that I could not make use of it. I would endeavor to lead him into such a trap again.

“ It is a beautiful country, is it not ? ” I remarked, going to the window before which he stood, and looking out. “ You must enjoy it greatly, after the turmoil of society.” You see, I was once as gay as any of them, in the old days ; and so I made the reflection that seemed natural to his case, wondering how he would answer.

“ It is indeed a very passable landscape,” he said indifferently. “ With horses and a charming companion one may kill a little time here, and find a satisfaction in killing it.” I noticed the slip, by which he spoke of a single companion instead of two.

“ Yes,” I replied, “ the count is said to be a most agreeable man.”

He paused a moment, and the hesitation seemed to show that the count was not the companion he had in his mind.

“ Oh, certainly,” he said, at length, “ the count is very agreeable, and his daughter is the paragon of all the virtues and accomplishments.” There was something a little disparaging in his tone as he made the last remark, which seemed to me a clumsy device to throw me off the scent, if scent there were. Considering his surpassing personal vanity, of which I had received an ocular demonstration when he visited me in Rome, I fancied that if there were nothing more serious in his thoughts he would have given me to understand that Hedwig found him entirely irresistible. Since he was able to control his vanity, there must be a reason for it.

“ I should think that the contessina must be charmed at having so brilliant a companion as yourself in her solitude,” I said, feeling my way to the point.

“ With me ? I am an old man. Children of that age detest old men.” I thought his manner constrained, and it was unlike him not to laugh as he made the speech. The conviction grew upon me that Hedwig was the object of his visit. Moreover, I became persuaded that he was but a poor sort of villain, for he was impulsive, as villains should never be. We leaned over the stone sill of the window, which he had opened during the conversation. There was a little trail of ants climbing up and down the wall at the side, and he watched them. One of the small creatures, heavily laden with a seed of some sort, and toiling painfully under the burden, had been separated from the rest, and clambered over the edge of the window-sill. On reaching the level surface it paused, as though very weary, and looked about, moving its tiny horns. Benoni looked at it a moment, and then with one finger he suddenly whisked the poor little thing into space. It hurt me to see it, and I knew he must be cruel, for he laughed aloud. Somehow, it would have seemed less cruel to have brushed away the whole trail of insects, rather than to

pitch upon this one small, tired workman, overladen and forgotten by the rest.

"Why did you do that?" I asked involuntarily.

"Why? Why do I do anything? Because I please, the best of all reasons."

"Of course; it was foolish of me to ask you. That is probably the cause of your presence here. You would like to hurl my boy Nino from the height he has reached in his love, and to satisfy your cruel instincts you have come here to attack the heart of an innocent girl." I watched him narrowly, and I have often wondered how I had the courage to insult him. It was a bold shot at the truth, and his look satisfied me that I was not very wide of the mark. To accuse a gray-haired old man of attempting to win the affections of a young girl would seem absurd enough. But if you had ever seen Benoni, you would understand that he was anything but old, save for his snowy locks. Many a boy might envy the strange activity of his thin limbs, the bloom and freshness of his eager face, and the fire of his eyes. He was impulsive, too; for instead of laughing at the absurdity of the thing, or at what should have been its absurdity, as a more accomplished villain would have done, he was palpably angry. He looked quickly at me and moved savagely, so that I drew back, and it was not till some moments later that it occurred to him that he ought to seem amused.

"How ridiculous!" he cried at last, mastering his anger. "You are joking."

"Oh, of course I am joking," I answered, leaving the window. "And now I must wish you good-morning, with many apologies for my intrusion." He must have been glad to be rid of me, but he politely insisted on showing me to the gate. Perhaps he wanted to be sure that I should not ask questions of the servants.

As we passed through an outer hall, we came suddenly upon Hedwig, entering from the opposite direction, dressed in black, and looking like a beautiful shadow of pain. As I have told you, she did not know me. Benoni bowed to the ground, as she went by, making some flattering speech about her appearance. She had started slightly on first seeing us, and then she went on without speaking; but there was on her face a look of such sovereign scorn and loathing as I never saw on the features of any living being. And more than scorn, for there was fear and hatred with it; so that if a glance could tell a whole history, there would have been no detail of her feeling for Benoni left to guess.

This meeting produced a profound impression on me, and I saw her face in my dreams that night. Had anything been wanting to complete, in my judgment, the plan of the situation in the castle, that something was now supplied. The Jew had come there to get her for himself. She hated him for his own sake; she hated him because she was faithful to Nino; she hated him because he perhaps knew of her secret love for my boy. Poor maiden, shut up for days and weeks to come with a man she dreaded and scorned at once! The sight of her recalled to me that I had in my pocket the letter Nino had sent me for her, weeks before, and which I had found no means of delivering since I had been in Fillettino. Suddenly I was seized with a mad determination to deliver it at any cost. The baron bowed me out of the gate, and I paused outside when the ponderous door had swung on its hinges and his footsteps were echoing back through the court.

I sat down on the parapet of the bridle-path, and with my knife cut some of the stitches that sewed my money between my two waistcoats. I took out one of the bills of a hundred francs that were concealed within, I found the letter Nino had sent me for Hedwig, and

I once more rang the bell. The man who had admitted me came again, and looked at me in some astonishment. But I gave him no time to question me.

"Here is a note for a hundred francs," I said. "Take it, and give this letter to the Signora Contessina. If you bring me a written answer here to-morrow at this hour, I will give you as much more." The man was dumfounded for a moment, after which he clutched the money and the letter greedily, and hid them in his coat.

"Your excellency shall be punctually obeyed," he said, with a deep bow, and I went away.

It was recklessly extravagant of me to do this, but there was no other course. A small bribe would have been worse than none at all. If you can afford to pay largely, it is better to bribe a servant than to trust a friend. Your friend has nothing to gain by keeping your secret, whereas the servant hopes for more money in the future, and the prospect of profit makes him as silent as the grave.

I would certainly not have acted as I did, had I not met Hedwig in the hall. But the sight of her pale face and heavy eyes went to my heart, and I would have given the whole of my little fortune to bring some gladness to her, even though I might not see it. The situation, too, was so novel and alarming that I felt obliged to act quickly, not knowing what evils delay might produce.

On the following morning I went up to the gateway again and rang the bell. The same man appeared. He slipped a note into my hand, and I slipped a bill into his. But, to my surprise, he did not shut the door and retire.

"The signorina said your excellency should read the note, and I should accompany you," he said; and I saw he had his hat in his hand, as if ready to go. I tore open the note. It merely said that the servant was trustworthy, and would "instruct the Signor Grandi" how to act.

"You told the contessina my name, then?" I said to the man. He had announced me to the baron, and consequently knew who I was. He nodded, closed the door behind him, and came with me. When we were in the street, he explained that Hedwig desired to speak with me. He expounded the fact that there was a staircase in the rock, leading to the level of the town. Furthermore, he said that the old count and the baron occasionally drank deeply, as soldiers and adventurers will do, to pass the evening. The next time it occurred, he, the faithful servant, would come to my lodging and conduct me into the castle by the aforesaid passage, of which he had the key.

I confess I was unpleasantly alarmed at the prospect of making a burglarious entrance in such romantic fashion. It savored more of the last century than of the quiet and eminently respectable age in which we live. But then, the castle of Fillettino was built hundreds of years ago, and it is not my fault if it has not gone to ruin, like so many others of its kind. The man recommended me to be always at home after eight o'clock in the evening, in case I were wanted, and to avoid seeing the baron when he was abroad. He came and saw where I lived, and with many bows he left me.

You may imagine in what anxiety I passed my time. A whole week elapsed, and yet I was never summoned. Every evening at seven, an hour before the time named, I was in my room, waiting for some one who never came. I was so much disturbed in mind that I lost my appetite and thought of being bled again. But I thought it too soon, and contented myself with getting a little tamarind from the apothecary.

One morning the apothecary, who is also the postmaster, gave me a letter from Nino, dated in Rome. His engagement was over, he had reached Rome, and he would join me immediately.

F. Marion Crawford.

AT THE SATURDAY CLUB.

THIS is our place of meeting ; opposite
 That towered and pillared building : look at it ;
King's Chapel in the Second George's day,
 Rebellion stole its regal name away, —
Stone Chapel sounded better ; but at last
 The poisoned name of our provincial past
 Had lost its ancient venom ; then once more
Stone Chapel was *King's Chapel* as before, —
 (So let rechristened North Street, when it can,
 Bring back the days of Marlborough and Queen Anne !)

Next the old church your wandering eye will meet
 A granite pile that stares upon the street, —
 Our civic temple ; slanderous tongues have said
 Its shape was modelled from Saint Botolph's head,
 Lofty, but narrow ; jealous passers-by
 Say Boston always held her head too high.

Turn half-way round, and let your look survey
 The white façade that gleams across the way, —
 The many-windowed building, tall and wide,
 The palace-inn that shows its northern side
 In grateful shadow when the sunbeams beat
 The granite wall in summer's scorching heat ;
 This is the place ; whether its name you spell
 Tavern, or caravansera, or hotel.
 Would I could steal its echoes ! you should find
 Such store of vanished pleasures brought to mind, —
 Such feasts ! the laughs of many a jocund hour
 That shook the mortar from King George's tower, —
 Such guests ! What famous names its record boasts,
 Whose owners wander in the mob of ghosts !
 Such stories ! every beam and plank is filled
 With juicy wit the joyous talkers spilled,
 Ready to ooze, as once the mountain pine
 The floors are laid with oozed its turpentine !

A month had flitted since The Club had met ;
 The day came round ; I found the table set,
 The waiters lounging round the iron stairs,
 Empty as yet the double row of chairs.
 I was a full half hour before the rest,
 Alone, the banquet-chamber's single guest.
 So from the table's side a chair I took,
 And having neither company nor book
 To keep me waking, by degrees there crept
 A torpor over me, — in short, I slept.
 Loosed from its chain, along the wreck-strown track
 Of the dead years my soul goes travelling back ;